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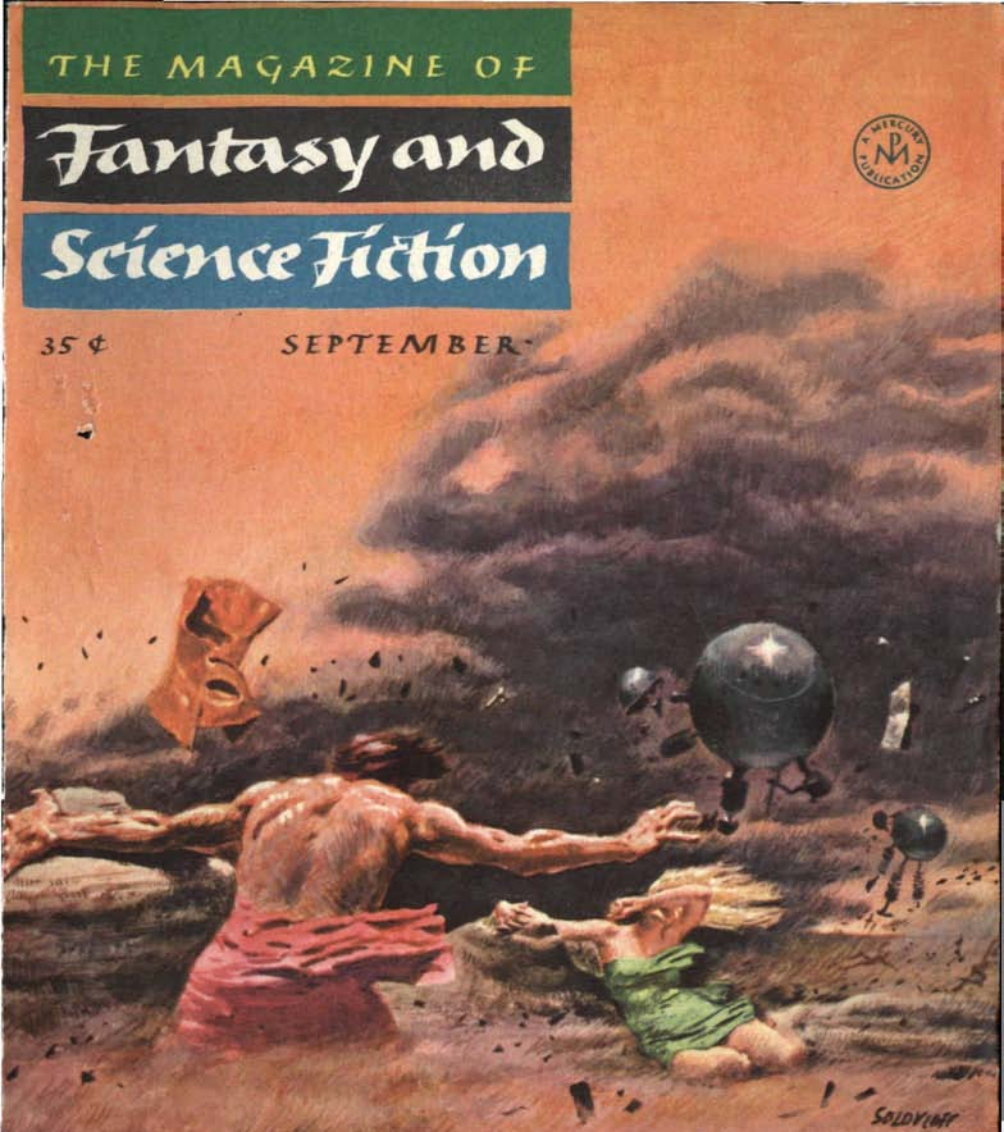

ONE TOO MANY, a short novel
by J. T. McIntosh

WILLIAM MORRISON J. FRANCIS McCOMAS

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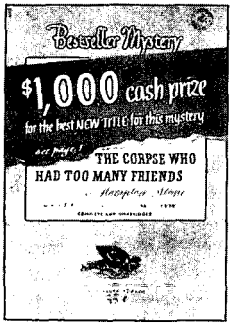

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 7, No. 3 SEPTEMBER

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git thar fustest with the bestest!

F&SF would like to indulge in a little justifiable pointing-with-pride:

item, August Derleth's collection of the top stories of the past year, PORTALS OF TOMORROW, published by Rinehart last May, contains 16 stories, of which 6 are from F&SF — 38%, with no other magazine having more than 2;

item, the annual Bleiler-Dikty BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, to be published by Fell in September, will contain 13 stories, of which 5 are from F&SF — again 38%, and again no competitor having more than 2;

item, since its first full year of publication, F&SF has never had less than 4 stories in the Bleiler-Dikty annual, and in every year but one it has led all competitors;

item, Mr. Derleth writes in his introduction, "Of those magazines devoted solely to fantasy [which he has defined to include science fiction] in the calendar year of 1953, the highest literary average was maintained by *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*";

item, the Derleth collection includes a valuable checklist of all new fantasy and s.f. stories published in 1953, with the "outstanding titles" starred. There are 70 of these starred titles from fantasy magazines, of which 29 (41%) are from F&SF, the nearest rival trailing with 10;

item, from Fall 1950 to December 1953, F&SF published 270 new, non-reprint stories. Of these, 71 (26%) have been published or contracted for in anthologies other than F&SF's own annual BEST series. Add these collections of our own and the various books other than anthologies, and 127, or very nearly 50%, of our stories have appeared in book form.

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We don't think we need to say much concerning J. T. McIntosh's One *series.* One in Three Hundred *(F&SF, February, 1953) was as popular a story as we've ever published; your letters began pouring in at once, the anthologists started quarreling about reprint rights, and in our recent contest for letters on the best stories of 1953, your ballots put it in first place by an easy light-year or two ahead of its nearest competitor.* One in a Thousand *(F&SF, January, 1954) proved a wholly worthy successor; and now Mr. McIntosh completes this trilogy of intimate human reaction to world-disaster with the longest of the three stories — in which the few survivors of the devastated Earth try to build a new and better civilization on Mars, and Lieutenant Bill Easson, one of the men who faced the terrible problem of selecting the survivors, learns that, in such a small and vital group, one single wrong selection may be . . .*

One Too Many

by J. T. MCINTOSH

ILLUSTRATION BY NICK SOLOVIOFF

"YOU AND I ought to be friends, Bill," said Alec Ritchie, in his usual good-humored tone, "because the two best-looking girls in what's left of the human race come and visit us."

I grinned involuntarily. "Is that a good reason?" I asked. "Anyway, I didn't know I was being unfriendly."

"You weren't," Ritchie said cheerfully, "but you don't like me and you only make half-hearted attempts to hide it."

I didn't answer that, because it was perfectly true.

Ritchie was one of those fortyish, stocky, even-tempered men who laugh a lot with their faces but never with their eyes, and whom hardly anyone ever does like very much. Lieutenant Porter was dead, killed in the lifeship crash which had broken Ritchie's leg, but he probably hadn't liked Ritchie either. Why he had chosen Ritchie and brought him to Mars was all too obvious. Ritchie's daughter Aileen was almost certainly one of the two most beautiful girls on Mars, just as he said.

Whether Leslie was the other I couldn't say. She was my wife, and I was biased. Besides, I hadn't seen all the others. Neither had Ritchie, but he was evidently prepared to guess. I imagined he would always be ready to

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guess, particularly if there was any percentage in it. How Ritchie and I came to be in neighboring beds in a casualty ward on Mars is a long story — but as you say, long stories can be cut short.

Earth was dead, boiled sterile by a sun which had suddenly stepped up its output. Ritchie and I were two of a few thousand lucky ones who had not only got a place on one of the lifeships, but also landed safely on Mars. Fairly safely, anyway.

And Mars?

Take one small, moribund planet, cold, dry, brittle, dark and cheerless. Turn on spit for two months, one complete turn every twenty-four and a half hours. Serve piping hot to 14,000 hungry and uncritical guests just in from space.

And don't blame any remarks they may make on Mrs. Beaton.

When all that extra heat from the new, brighter sun had first hit Mars, practically all the water on the planet, whether it was ice, liquid or mixed with the dust of erosion in the dull, bodiless mud of Mars, had been lifted right up into the atmosphere. A lot of the dust went with it. There were black clouds, sand storms, dust storms, and as soon as the particle-laden water vapor hit streams of colder air, torrents of muddy rain. It couldn't have been an altogether pleasant time for the 7,000 people who had been on Mars at the time — the colony which had existed before the big migration became necessary.

But at that time I had been mainly concerned with getting my lifeship and the ten people in it to Mars, whatever the conditions there were like. That was enough to worry about without looking for more.

Well, I'd done that. That worry was over. Now all I wanted to do was stay in bed for twenty years or so, smiling modestly when people came to visit me and tell me what a magnificent job I'd done.

Sammy Hoggan came to visit me and told me: "You've been swinging the lead long enough, Bill. While you still had those bandages over your eyes there might have been some excuse, but now it's high time you stopped malingering and started earning your keep."

Behind me, Ritchie laughed uproariously. "That's telling him," he spluttered happily.

"This is a private discussion, mister," said Sam coldly. "Bill's a friend of mine. We've been through a lot. We understand each other. Kindly go fly a kite."

Sammy clearly didn't like Ritchie either. Ritchie merely laughed again. He never lost his temper.

"Where's Leslie?" I asked Sammy.

"She's working, pinhead. Don't you know yet only one can get away

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from the job at a time? Work party No. 94 can't spare two people to come and hold Bill Easson's hand, even if he is pretending to be dying."

"What's the job you're doing?"

"Digging holes," said Sammy succinctly.

"And filling them in again?" I asked, because that seemed to be the implication.

"No, we don't have to do that. The wind does it for us."

"Who's in charge?"

"Of the whole show, or just 94?"

In the hospital we didn't know much about the general situation. No one had time to explain it to us.

"You tell me, Sammy," I suggested, "taking it I know but nothing."

"You don't have to tell me that," Sammy assured me. "You always were an ignorant cuss. Well, such government as there is at the moment is on the additive principle. You know, you start with a hut, build two rooms on to it, then a corridor all round, then an east wing, then a hall, a west wing, some more corridors and an annex, all carefully planned so that every time you want to go to the lavatory you have to go up and down six flights of stairs and walk three miles along passages.

"Anyway, the original colony had its own administration, of course, and when the big spaceships got here the top brass added themselves on to that, and when the lifeships arrived the lieutenants were added on to *that*, so that now —"

He interrupted himself and asked belligerently: "Do you follow that, or can't you understand a simple explanation?"

I grinned. "Now tell me who's in charge of 94."

"Me, until they throw you out of here. Leslie, when I'm not around."

"So I'm still the boss, am I?"

"I wouldn't say that, but you're still supposed to take the rap for anything that goes wrong, if that's what you mean. Lifeship crews are staying together as units, lieutenants in charge. Sometimes a work party wants a different lieutenant, or a lieutenant wants a different work party, and there's a switch. But that isn't happening often."

"Surprising," I commented, "but good to hear all the same."

"You mean, Sammy," said Ritchie from the next bed, "that as far as the work parties are concerned these so-called lieutenants are still the little tin gods — no chance for anyone else to step in and run things? No offense, Bill."

Sammy turned a cold eye on Ritchie again. "I thought I told you this was a private discussion," he observed. "And my name's Hoggan."

"Pleased to meet you," said Ritchie affably. "My name's Ritchie."

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Sammy's sense of humor almost got the better of him. He nearly laughed. He was hard put to it to remember he didn't like Ritchie and retort bluntly: "All right, Ritchie. You have my permission to exist. But do it quietly, will you? I want to talk to Bill."

"Go ahead," said Ritchie airily.

Sammy stared at him for a moment, then turned back to me. "Seriously," he said, "there isn't much need for government just now, and by the time we do need it there'll be something better. On the whole, things would be all right but for — Holy Moses, what's this?"

We looked round at a sudden uproar of whistles and wolf-calls from the other men in the ward. Sammy hadn't heard it before, but I had. It meant Leslie or Aileen had just come in.

This time it was Leslie. She hurried along the ward, paying no attention to the chorus of approbation, and stopped at the foot of my bed.

"I need you, Sammy," she said breathlessly, paying no attention to me. "It's Morgan again."

"What's he doing now?" Sammy sighed, hoisting himself up in a way that showed how glad he must have been to sit down.

"It's what he's not doing," she told him. "I've done all I can, with no result. Now you'll have to come and clout his ear."

"You might have done that yourself, without bothering me," Sammy grumbled. "Surely you didn't let a little thing like that stop you?"

"That" was the sling supporting her right arm.

"Frankly, I did," said Leslie. "Morgan's looking ugly." She took a couple of quick steps, bent over and pecked me briefly on the cheek. There was uproar in the ward again. Then she hustled Sammy out. Apart from that quick peck she hadn't even glanced at me.

And odd though it might seem, I was pleased. I hadn't thought Leslie was going to be as businesslike and brisk and good at handling people as it seemed she was. I should have known, I suppose. She had been a schoolteacher, and handling twenty to thirty boisterous kids was probably good practice for handling a work party.

So Morgan Smith was giving trouble again, which meant he had been giving trouble before.

"Who's this fellow who's making a nuisance of himself?" asked Ritchie curiously.

"Morgan Smith. Why?"

"Oh, sometimes it's useful to know about people who make a nuisance of themselves."

I grunted and went back to my thoughts.

Morgan had been a gamble, but so had they all. With only a short time

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to pick out ten people to be rescued from an Earth heading for disaster, I had known all along the risk that some of the men and women I chose, instead of being the people who most deserved to live, would be the people above all who should have been left behind.

Sammy hadn't been serious, I knew, when he said I was malingering, but when I looked round the ward it seemed that everyone else there was so much more seriously hurt than I was that it was high time I was up and earning my keep, as Sammy said. Besides, if there was any strong-arm stuff to be done in my work party, I should be the one to do it. Sammy was tough enough, but slightly built. Leslie, normally, could look after herself, but not with a broken ulna. John Stowe and Harry Phillips were much older than Morgan. I was the only one so much stronger and tougher than Morgan that he'd be ill-advised to give me any trouble.

No one seemed to be asleep. I bellowed: "Nurse!"

She appeared at once, a rather hard-faced woman who had once, I believed, been matron of a big London hospital. When she saw who had called for her she frowned. We knew she had three other wards to look after. We weren't supposed to bother her more than we could help, and people like me weren't supposed to bother her at all.

"I know you're busy, nurse," I said. "I just want to remove myself from your charge. Seems there's trouble in my work party, and . . ."

"Lieutenant," she said wearily, "there's trouble in every work party. People don't like working fourteen hours a day. When you join your group, you'll have to give orders, and you'll have to be fit."

"I know, but . . ."

"People who can't take orders generally aren't very good at giving them. Wait till the doctor sees you. When he says you can go, you'll go."

She didn't wait to hear what I had to say to this, but made her way out of the ward again.

"That seems to be that," said Ritchie.

I ignored him.

Now that I knew I had to stay where I was, I was even more impatient to get out of the hospital. Things were going on; Mars was being reshaped, my ex-crew, now work party 94, was working on a job, and I wasn't with them.

The rain started again soon after that. Considering how little water there was on Mars, compared with Earth, it was astonishing what the planet could do with it. I hadn't seen the rain yet, for there were no windows in our ward, but I'd heard it. Often.

None of us in the ward knew at first hand what conditions outside were like, for the recent history of all of us was the same. We had all been injured

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in lifeship landings on Mars, and had been brought straight to hospital.

This time the rain sounded worse than usual. I wasn't surprised when Leslie came back and the whistles sounded again.

Men are like that. Some of the patients in the ward were pretty badly smashed up, but show them an attractive girl and they'd holler and whistle, just to show they weren't dead yet. Even those who moaned and whined and tossed about at other times made a gallant effort to look happy and well when Leslie or Aileen was in the ward. That sort of thing could give you a lump in the throat if you let it.

"We've knocked off for a bit," Leslie told me, sitting on the bed. There was nowhere else to sit. "We couldn't do anything. We can hardly see." She sighed. "I'll be glad when you're back, Bill."

"I tried to get out of here, but was slapped down. What exactly is the trouble, Leslie? What's wrong?"

She pulled herself together and smiled brightly — the too-quick smile of so many women when the last thing they feel like doing is smiling. "Oh, nothing really," she said. "Don't bother about it now. Just get well, Bill, and don't worry. We'll be all right."

"Tell me," I insisted.

She hesitated, then it all came out in a rush. "It's no one thing, Bill. It's about a hundred things, all piling up. It's the rain, and the winds, and the dust, and the heat. Sand and dust in everything, grit in your mouth and eyes and hair. It's the work — digging out foundations for buildings, and the wind filling them with sand and dust. Everybody grumbling, saying the same things over and over again. It's trying to sleep in a corridor, packed like sardines, with the sweat running all over you."

She tried to stop, but the words came pouring out of her. "Then there's the food, things you can't identify, things that taste like string. No milk. No coffee. No eggs. No meat. No hot drinks, because water boils when it's lukewarm. Washing in muddy water, because we've only enough clean water for drinking and cooking.

"Everybody coming to you with their troubles. Betty afraid that with all this work she's going to lose her baby. Little Bessie always in the way. Young Jim working far too hard, the only one we have to stop working sometimes. People from other crews trying to drag us into their quarrels. Backbreaking days that go on and on and on until you really believe there's never going to be an end to them, though you're so tired your brain's buzzing. Being hot, cold, drenched, parched, tired and restless, all within an hour or so. Oh, I could scream!"

"Don't scream here," I said, "but cry if you like — you might enjoy that better than screaming."

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"I expect so," Leslie said moodily, "but you need training to cry in front of all these people, and I haven't got it. Anyway, there's all that, and Morgan."

"Yes?" I said. "What about Morgan?"

"Morgan's a kind of last straw. I don't really mind the weather or the food or sleeping with nineteen other women, because no one can do anything about it. And the work's got to be done. There can't be any improvement until we've put up more buildings, grown more crops and all the rest of it. But Morgan . . ."

"Well, what's he doing?" I asked a little impatiently.

She shook her head. "Wait till you see for yourself."

"Why the mystery? If he's a nuisance, he must be doing something. What is it?"

"Just being a heel," said Leslie, "in every possible, conceivable way. He's making Betty's life hell, though the poor kid tries to hide it. Whatever he ought to do, he does the exact opposite. No, I knew I couldn't describe it so you'd understand. You'll know soon enough."

She looked up as Aileen came in to see Ritchie. She and Aileen nodded to each other.

"You know her?" I murmured.

"She's in 92, working near us. And she's one of the nineteen women I sleep with. After eight hours crushed up against someone, you feel you know her."

I grinned. "I know it's easy for me to be cheerful," I said, "but is everything really as black as all that? Just look back. On Earth all that mattered was getting a place on a lifeship. People would have given anything for that."

"I know," she said gloomily. "You needn't remind me how I tried to bribe you."

She must really be feeling low if she took it that way. I pretended she hadn't said anything.

"Then when we were on the lifeship," I went on quickly, "we just wanted to get safely to Mars. Nothing else mattered. Even if we'd been told about this, we'd have thought it was heaven. Now we're here, and in no immediate danger any more, yet we're —"

"I know," she said, still in the same gloomy tone. "We're waiting for something worse. At least, I am. Can you blame me, Bill? All along we've thought: *If only we get through this all right, everything will be wonderful.* And it never is."

"When something like this happens," I said quietly, "no one has any right to think things are going to be wonderful. You have to be satisfied

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just to be alive. After a big smack like this, things even out only gradually. You've got to be patient."

I grinned again. "It's just as well I know you, Leslie, or I'd be doing you an injustice. You're only unloading all this on me because you've been cheerfully accepting everything that everybody else unloaded on you. You feel you ought to have a chance to moan about things too."

She smiled despite herself. "There may be something in that. Oh damn, hear that? I think the rain's off. I'll have to go back."

She stood up straight with an effort. "Hurry and come back, Bill," she said. "I miss you."

"That's nice," I said. "But do it with moderation. Don't miss me too much."

Aileen didn't go when Leslie did. Apparently it was Aileen's rest period. With Leslie gone, I looked idly at Aileen, who was talking quietly with Ritchie.

She was certainly a good-looking girl, rather like Leslie in some ways. They were both blondes for a start, Aileen very light, Leslie a deeper gold. Neither of them was the model type. They both had the slim waist and long, slender legs of a model, but they didn't have the exaggeration of breast and hip. They both looked intelligent — in fact, intelligent rather than pretty. And they moved with the same lithe assurance.

The red-headed youth across from me kept trying to catch Aileen's eye and making mildly erotic gestures. That sort of thing never bothered Leslie, but it was obviously annoying Aileen. I heard her murmur to Ritchie: "So help me, I'm going to blister that character's ears on my way out." Ritchie chuckled.

I noticed that Aileen and Ritchie never touched each other. Her manner towards him was more that of a rather nervous secretary than that of a loving daughter.

When at last Aileen rose to go, she looked across at the red-haired youth, obviously intending to go over and blister his ears as she had threatened.

"Aileen!" I said sharply.

She turned, a little startled. She had never spoken to me. But when I beckoned she came and bent over me.

"That redhead," I said quietly, "is going to die tonight or tomorrow night."

She straightened abruptly. "Oh," she said, and her face went pink. "Thanks for telling me — Lieutenant Easson, isn't it?"

I nodded. She walked away along the ward. She must have flashed a friendly smile at the redhead, from the reactions of the other men in the ward, but as her back was to me I didn't see it.

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Ritchie grinned at me. "Why did you have to spoil it?" he asked playfully. "Why didn't you let her blister his ears, and *then* find out?"

I frowned. "You think that would have been funny?" I asked.

"Yes. But then, I've been told I have a peculiar sense of humor."

"You have," I told him, and pointedly looked away. I heard Ritchie chuckle, meaninglessly.

The doctor wouldn't clear me that day, or the next. The day after that I was given my clothes and told I could go, but should take it easy.

The way it was said made it clear that it was said from habit, not because the doctor thought I *would* take it easy, or that anyone could afford to nurse himself with things as they were.

Before I went, when it was known I was going, Ritchie made me a proposition.

"Ever struck you, Bill, that this is the greatest chance ever for smart business men?" he asked.

"What is?"

"The set-up here. Rebuilding. Starting again. It's better than getting in on the ground floor. It's a chance to move into the basement."

"Money doesn't exist any more," I said shortly, a little disgusted at the idea of making capital out of mankind's greatest disaster.

Ritchie shrugged his heavy shoulders. "What's money? All that ever mattered was what you could get for it. This is a chance to get it. Now, you're still a lieutenant, Bill. You have power, and any little piece of power you have is a chance to get more. If you and I work together, starting not when it's too late, but right now —"

"Not interested," I said flatly. I was going to say more, angrily, but Ritchie's smooth, pleasant voice cut in.

"Listen, Bill, I understand your idealism. I like you for it. But don't you see what's going to happen? If you're not ambitious, someone else will be. You want to make Mars a safe place, a good place. Fine. And while you're doing it someone will be building himself up so that when you've made Mars a safe place, a good place, he'll be able to step in and take it from you."

I stared at him.

"I'm not suggesting," said Ritchie earnestly, "that you *shouldn't* work for the good of everybody. Of course you will. But don't forget, while you're doing it, that human beings aren't perfect. Don't forget that you can't rely on everyone to be as honest and unselfish and idealistic as you. Look after your interests — no one else will. Come in with me, help me, and you and I will —"

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"You're making quite a lot of sense," I said, "but the answer's still no. Build your own empire, Ritchie."

"All right," said Ritchie evenly. "I will."

So before I was even out of the hospital I should have been pretty well prepared for the many battles which I knew were coming. I knew about Mars, though not at first hand. I knew about the people who were trying to make it a world fit to live in. I knew about Morgan Smith. And I knew about Alec Ritchie. I wouldn't have had to be much of a prophet to have a general picture of what was going to happen.

I wasn't much of a prophet. Or I didn't think. What happened hardly ever found me better prepared than anyone else.

II

When I came out of the hospital alone, I stood still for a long time at the door and just looked around me.

This was the future home of the human race — now and for a long time to come. Mercury, Venus and Earth would be too hot for human beings for millions of years. Science would have to advance about twice as far as it had already come from zero before Jupiter or any of the other outer planets could be forced to provide a comfortable environment for mankind. There would be little settlements, undoubtedly, on asteroids and satellites. But now and for untold generations Mars was the only place for men and women to live.

That made grumbles about the world itself absolutely pointless. It was now of purely academic interest that there had once been a world on which water boiled at 100° C.

If the pre-space-travel calculations had been correct and Mars had had an atmosphere too thin and with too little oxygen to support human life, human life would simply have ceased to exist when the sun underwent its change. As it was, we could only be thankful that Mars, under its new conditions, had just enough air, water, and whatever else we needed to enable us to live fairly comfortably on it until we were once more in a position to take command of our environment.

That wouldn't be soon. We had left a highly mechanized culture back on Earth, but it would be some time before we had climbed to the same point on Mars. For a year or two at least things would be very primitive. Hydroelectric power was out of the question, and the use of oil, gasoline or coal for generating electricity was just as impracticable. We simply had to use the new source of power, the one we didn't know very much about — atomic power.

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That meant that there would be plenty of power when we had any at all.

Nuclear physics had come a long way since the time when the power of the atom could only be used to make a big bang. But it hadn't come anywhere near the beautiful simplicity of really efficient technology. Atom power was still huge, clumsy and uncertain.

None of the spaceships was atom-powered. It was a pity, in a way, that such a wonder-fuel as moluone had been discovered, back in the fifties. Instead of having to plug away at atomic power to make space-travel possible, the interplanetary pioneers had turned their backs on it, since they didn't need it, and now we had to start from scratch. Moluone was a wonder-fuel for space-travel, all right, but it was no earthly use for ground-based industry. If there had been just one experimental atom-powered ship, it might have saved 20,000 people ten years of toil.

I sighed and moved away from the door of the research station. People were going in and coming out, and I was in the way. Nobody paid any attention to me, apart from a few people who glanced curiously at my uniform, as if they had never seen such a thing before.

Nobody else was wearing anything like my uniform, certainly. Every other person I saw, of either sex, wore a sort of smock, except a few men who wore only shorts. The improvised garment which was so generally worn was like shorts and a sleeveless shirt except that it was in one piece. If existing shorts and shirts were used, they were sewn together at the waist. So far I didn't know why. There was seldom any attempt, even in the case of the women, to make the one-piece suits attractive. There were none with halter tops or bare backs or low necklines. They were plain and strong and simple. But of course the girls who were attractive looked attractive anyway.

I made my way slowly to where party 94 was working. I'd been told where to go. No one around had so little to do that he had time to come and show me the way. As I went I continued my first survey of the Martian scene.

There had been a colony of about 7,000 people on Mars before the disaster. That didn't seem many now, but it had been a lot when Mars was a dead world, a mere research station for astronomers, physicists, metallurgists, geologists, archeologists, botanists and scores of other ists.

With all the people that the regular spaceships and the lifeships had been able to bring from the doomed Earth in the time available, there still weren't many more than 20,000 people on Mars, including all the ists.

From the short-term point of view, it was just as well that there weren't any more. The fact that there had been permanent accommodation for

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7,000 people for a start meant that there was some sort of temporary accommodation for the whole 20,000.

The settlement had been called Winant, after the first man to land on Mars, and it looked as if the town that was going to grow up round it would be called Winant too. So many people had so many different ideas about what to call the first Martian township that the easiest way out of the impasse seemed to be to use the existing name.

The Winant scene was typical of all Mars. The sun was bright, surrounded and diffused by a strong haze. Mars would always have a lot of dust in the atmosphere. It was warm, but not unbearably hot; the air generally was so dry that people could be comfortable at much higher temperatures than could have been borne on Earth. The smaller effort that the reduced gravity called for was another thing that made the heat bearable.

The sky was deep, luminous blue — deeper than it had ever been on Earth. The ground was colorful, though flat and almost featureless —red, yellow, green and brown. Most of the rocks near the surface had been worn long ago into sand and dust. But here and there were little ridges of rock and stone, eroded to mere remnants of the mountains they must once have been.

Mars hadn't had an earthquake for millions of years. The ground surface was very much as it must have been in the time of the first Cro-Magnon on Earth. There was nothing much to see on Mars itself — there never was. The only native form of life was plant life — lichen and a few varieties of moss. There was plenty of that.

Anything of interest had to be supplied by the people from Earth. Around Winant there was plenty. First there were the long, flat buildings of the research station, built not for this new Mars but for the cold, dark, sterile world Mars had been before the sun stepped up its output. There were hardly any windows.

All round the station buildings were piles of equipment, stones, metal from broken-up lifeships, stores of all kinds — mostly fastened down firmly so that the gales, of which there was no sign at present, couldn't scatter them all over the landscape. Drawn up behind the station were about a hundred lifeships, being used for temporary accommodation. Behind them again were the larger spaceships, the ships which had been in existence before the emergency was known.

Among the ships were corralled the cattle which had been brought from Earth. It seemed crazy to bring cattle to Mars instead of human beings, but unless such provision had been made we would have had to manage henceforth without meat, milk, leather and wool. As it was, we had none of these things at the moment; we couldn't allow the cattle

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to breed until we had fodder for them. They ate the sparse Martian lichen, but it wasn't enough. They needed Earth-type grass, which was only now being introduced to Mars.

In front of the station, about a hundred yards from it, thousands of people were engaged on what looked already like vast excavations. We had heard blasting frequently in the hospital.

I stopped a tall girl who was on her way towards the huge hole in the rock. "What's going on there?" I asked.

Miraculously, even here she was chewing something. It couldn't be gum; there wasn't any.

"Just out of the hospital, lieutenant?" she said in the well-remembered accents of Brooklyn. "You want to know what we're doing? We're digging out a cliff face. When we've got it, we're going to dig caves in it. Now I got to run."

"Thanks," I said.

"You're welcome," said Brooklyn.

There was more sense in it than appeared at first. We could live on the surface, but we wanted greater atmospheric pressure if we could get it. We *could* get it, by digging for it. A mile or two down, conditions would be appreciably nearer what we were used to. Besides, long ago our ancestors had found that caves made very comfortable houses. Dig a hole in a perpendicular face of rock, find some way of closing it behind you, and you have a very fair house.

But I had spent long enough getting my bearings in this new world. I picked my way among the piles of material in search of work party 94. I was light-headed, stiff, a little uncertain on my feet and had a dull ache in my temples. But in what proportions my light-headedness was owing to the light air pressure of Mars and to my convalescence I didn't know. My lungs weren't troubled at all. There was slightly more oxygen in the Martian mixture than there had been in the Terran variety of air. Some of it had been released recently by the extra heat warming the many surface oxides.

When I found 94 I didn't have time for any greetings. Harry Phillips, Caroline and Jim Stowe turned and saw me. They didn't show any sign of welcome, only of relief.

Harry said: "Son, I think you'd better get round the back fast."

"What's the matter?"

"If I were you I wouldn't waste any time finding out."

I didn't. Round the back was behind a stone wall about ten feet high. I was still unsteady, but on Mars I could run. I did run.

Morgan had his back to me. I could see Leslie's face over his shoulder,

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but not, at first, what he was doing. She didn't see me either. She was scared.

Then I saw Morgan was picking and pulling and jabbing at her injured arm, holding her other wrist so that she couldn't get away. He wasn't so much hurting her as trying to frighten her, and in that he was succeeding very well.

I didn't rush in at once. I waited until I was quite sure what was going on, and that Morgan wasn't merely defending himself against some ill-considered attack by Leslie, and until I was good and mad. Then I stepped forward, swung Morgan round and planted my fist hard on his nose. What happened was more of a surprise to me than to him.

I had grown used to the light gravity of Mars, but hadn't had much opportunity to learn all its effects. With the force of the blow Morgan and I staggered away from each other. Morgan was the one who was unlucky. His foot caught on a stone and he went over hard, the force of his fall being caused more by his momentum than by gravity. I saw he was out and turned to Leslie.

"Where's Sammy?" I demanded.

"At the stores." She pushed back her disheveled hair and straightened herself abruptly as if to shake the fright out of herself. "He can't always be around. Glad to see you, Bill."

"Has this sort of thing happened often?"

She shrugged. "All the time, more or less. Not that exactly, but something like it."

"But why don't the rest of you gang up on Morgan?"

She shrugged again. "We have, occasionally. He always gets his own back. So generally we don't."

I exploded. "For heaven's sake! Morgan's just a cheap would-be tough guy. He can't build himself up into a menace unless you let him."

"Not," said Leslie patiently, "if you happen to be stronger than he is. We're not."

"Two of you are."

"If there's two around. You don't know much about the ordinary, typical child bully, do you, Bill? I do. He doesn't do anything when he isn't going to get away with it. Little Jimmy comes home crying, and Johnny gets a beating. Next day Johnny takes it out of little Jimmy. And this time little Jimmy knows better than to come home crying and blame it on Johnny. That's Morgan — a naughty boy, cruel, selfish and petty, grown up physically but not mentally. He likes people to be afraid of him. He has to show he's the boss. He —"

I shook my head brusquely. "If that's all, we'll soon knock it out of him."

"There speaks," said Leslie ironically, "the bigger and stronger boy."

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"I don't say you can beat consideration for others into someone who doesn't have any. But you can make him toe the line, and that's what Morgan will have to do."

"All right," said Leslie with a wry grin. "You try it."

"I will," I said. "Better have a look and make sure he hasn't broken his skull."

"I sincerely hope he has."

Morgan came to as we looked down at him. His eyes burned at me. He didn't have to say anything. His look spoke his hate.

"Watch your step, Morgan," I warned him. "From what I hear it's no good appealing to your better nature. So I'll just say the next time I find you stepping out of line I'll beat the hell out of you. Now get back to work."

"Work!" he exclaimed, his voice quivering with impotent resentment. Blood was streaming from his nose and he nursed his ankle theatrically. "How can I —"

"That's for you to find out," I said dispassionately. "If you're not up in five seconds I'll kick you in the ribs."

He was up and round the other side of the storage pile, well inside the five seconds, limping dramatically but moving quickly all the same.

"That may be the way to treat him," Leslie admitted. "If he's scared of you, you may be able to handle him. But don't count on it. I've had twisted kids — the more you beat Johnny, the more he had to beat little Jimmy. If you half-killed Johnny, that was just too bad for little Jimmy."

"What's the answer?"

She shook her head. "There isn't an answer. At least, the only answer's in psychotherapy, and pretty well hidden at that."

"This time there was another answer," I said, frowning. "Not bringing Morgan along. I should have found it."

She'd been arguing with me, but at that she changed sides at once. "You couldn't know everything, Bill," she said warmly. "It's not your fault that Morgan —"

"If bringing Morgan here was a mistake," I said, "it was my mistake. We argued about this before, back on Earth, and we didn't agree then. You thought all the biggest, the best, the greatest, the cleverest people should come along. I thought —"

"You were right, Bill. You were supposed to pick ten decent, ordinary people, and Morgan looked like a decent, ordinary person."

I nodded, and we didn't say any more about the matter. But I went on thinking about it, as I went back with her and found where everybody was and what they were doing, and what I was supposed to do.

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The disaster had been a great chance to build a really worthwhile community. Back on Earth we'd always had the excuse that we couldn't destroy the criminals, the insane, the psychotics and the weak-minded, and so we could never have a perfect community. When the disaster came, we lieutenants had had that chance. We could just quietly ignore the criminals, the insane, the psychotics and the weak-minded, and make sure that if we didn't have saints we had at least eliminated the worst of the sinners. And I hadn't taken that chance, apparently.

Leslie obviously thought Morgan was bad through and through. I hoped she was wrong.

In a way, all Mars, the whole future of the human race, depended on the lieutenants' choice. Decent, reasonable people would build a decent, reasonable community — and it would go on being what it was at the start. The future isn't what happens to happen, remote, untouchable. The future is what we have now, what we do, what we want, what we are.

The future was Leslie, Sammy, the Austrian doctor at the hospital, Alec Ritchie, the gum-chewing girl from Brooklyn — and Morgan.

I hoped it was a good future. I wasn't going to judge Morgan on hearsay, even on what Leslie said. I would give him every chance.

However, from what I'd seen I could only hope that a future with Morgan in it would be a good future. I couldn't count on it.

III

Things for the most part went fairly smoothly. It's not worth detailing all the jobs work party 94 did; there were too many of them, and we rarely saw much of any one. It was a pity the different work parties couldn't be taken into the planning more and given some overall impression of the work they were helping to do. People work better when they have a clear purpose and a set goal.

But there was no time for explanations yet. It was a case of "Do this until I tell you to stop," "Carry all that stuff from here to there," "Dig here until someone comes and tells you what else to do," and after a long, back-breaking day of toil in which nothing obvious had been accomplished, a hot, stuffy, restless night in one of the corridors at the research station.

The nights were worse than the days. As far as temperature was concerned, there was no happy medium. Outside, it was below freezing; inside, the ventilating system planned to cope with 7,000 people labored hopelessly in its efforts to supply fresh, clean, cool air for three times that number.

We split up at night. Sammy and Harry Phillips were in one of the annexes with no less than ninety-eight other single men. Bessie was in

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one children's dormitory, Jim Stowe in another — the best accommodation naturally went to growing children. Leslie's status had changed since I left hospital. She and I, the Stowes and three other couples shared a tiny room which had once been a reading-room — but nobody had any time for reading any more. Betty and Morgan were with five other couples in another tiny room somewhere.

I wondered sometimes how the research station staff, the people who had been there before the disaster, felt about this invasion. In those early days I seldom met any of them to find out, or if I did I didn't know it. For now the state of all of us was the same: a pair of hands and an aching back — whether we had come in the spaceships or lifeships or had been there all the time.

The main difficulty about the building situation was that the prevailing conditions didn't allow of temporary housing at all. The gales would blow tents and huts away. Light, flimsy structures weighed so little that it didn't take much of a wind to tear them away from the loose surface of Mars. When a house was built, the first essential was a deep, strong foundation. There was clay lower down, but the surface was shifting sand or fine dust.

By this time, the people who had been there longer than we had were telling us, the weather was really beginning to settle down. Though it rained every day, they pointed out that at least it was fairly clean rain.

A lot of the dust was out of the atmosphere now, though there were strange, beautiful effects at sunset and sunrise. The gales were not quite so fierce as they had been at first, and there were hardly any whirlwinds any more. Mars, after all, had few mountains, which was a factor tending towards stability; the ground and the air above it were heated pretty evenly. There were occasional calm periods. Sometimes Mars was like California in June. But only sometimes.

I soon saw the reason for the simple one-piece garment that nearly everyone wore. I saw it on my first day in the open.

Leslie and I were checking stores. Suddenly it was raining. There was no warning at all. I looked quickly round for shelter.

"You don't shelter on Mars," Leslie told me. "Not from rain. It's the wind that drives us under cover."

It was undoubtedly true that by the time we reached shelter we'd be too wet to care. I wondered why I was so wet so quickly. Then I saw why. I looked inquiringly at Leslie.

She nodded. "The rain's almost horizontal," she said. "It often is."

With only two fifths of Earth's gravity and much the same wind velocity, the rain didn't so much pour down as sweep along like the wind. Used to

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Earth, you felt it was raining up at you. It made raincoats ridiculous. It went down your collar, up your legs, and in a matter of seconds you were as wet as if you'd plunged into a lake.

Leslie went on working unconcernedly. I was just about to make some comment when the rain stopped almost as quickly as it had begun. It had lasted only about three minutes.

It stands to reason that a wind following a rainstorm is a wet wind. It's blowing over wet ground, drying it, picking up water of evaporation.

Well, on Mars that doesn't follow. Conditions on Mars are so different from those of Earth that you have to forget all your weather lore and start again before you can predict anything. On Mars the wind wheels so often that if there's one thing you can be reasonably certain about, it's that you'll have a dry wind following rain. That is, a dry wind sweeping in from an angle.

About 60 seconds after the last drops of rain had fallen, Leslie's legs were dry. A few minutes later her clothes were only slightly damp.

"That's why you wear that outfit?" I asked. "It's loose and it dries quickly?"

"Oh no," she said. "You'll see the reason for that in a minute." She looked at my shirt and slacks and smiled faintly.

"It could be a reason," I said. "My pants are still wet at the knees."

It was half an hour before a real wind came. I staggered when it hit me. Leslie, who knew how to brace herself, wasn't visibly perturbed.

"We take cover now," she said calmly, "if we can. If not, we lie down."

We fought our way to the pile of stores where the others were huddled. All the way my trouser legs billowed and flapped like blankets left out in a storm. Twice the wind dragged my shirt out from under my waistband. It did it in little sharp tugs, an inch at a time. Before I could get my shirt to stay put I had to tighten my belt until it was cutting me in two.

"You see why we wear a one-piece suit?" said Leslie breathlessly, as we joined the other members of 94 in the shelter of two head-high walls at right angles.

It was obvious now. The only thing to wear in a swirling wind like that was something simple, strong and moulded to the body, something which didn't catch the wind and couldn't be torn open and off. My legs were tired with the effort of moving them. My pants had acted like sails.

"Where's Betty?" said Leslie suddenly, sharply. "Look, Bill — catch her!"

I was still pondering over the effects of a strong wind with only two-fifths Earth gravity to hold things down. I turned wildly, startled, not knowing what I was looking for.

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Leslie and I were strong and had plenty of power in our legs. Betty wasn't and hadn't. She was a featherweight at best; in a wind like that she was utterly helpless.

When I turned she was about twenty yards away. A second later she was less than ten. Somehow she was keeping herself upright, looking as if she was running but really being swept before the wind like a straw.

I leapt out and caught her — and we nearly knocked ourselves senseless. It was like when I hit Morgan. Gravity seems almost nothing, but inertia is still the same as ever. If Betty had run into a wall at the speed she had been going, she could have killed herself. I was quite hard enough to knock the wind out of her.

"Thanks, Bill," she gasped. "Oh, I was scared!"

"How often have I told you," Morgan snapped, "to lie down and stay put when a wind like that starts?"

"I know, Morgan," said Betty penitently. "But I couldn't. I was —"

"Then you're not going to last long on this unprintable world," said Morgan.

I considered slapping his head for that, but decided against it. Morgan had never sworn before. It was apparently part and parcel of his new self-assertion that he had to do everything that would shock or hurt or irritate the people around him. I had to be careful what evidences of it I noticed, or I'd be nagging at him the whole time.

Sammy was quite prepared to comment, though. "That's funny," he said in a tone of mild surprise, "I thought you came from a good home, Morgan."

Morgan pretended not to hear him.

That was a fair sample of the Martian weather. What really caused its extreme volatility was the steady rotation of the planet and the absence of large, open tracts of water, which would heat and cool fairly slowly. The red desert and the air over it were heated to at least 90° Fahrenheit, then spun into darkness at something below zero. The days on Mars would always be hot, the nights freezing. There would always be winds sweeping and swirling from the twilight zone. That was permanent.

However, in about twenty years, we were told, much of the temporary climatic upheaval would be over and Mars would begin to settle down to a less violent, more comfortable existence.

That would be fine for our children.

Crops came up rapidly in the few areas of good soil. There was enough water and plenty of heat. If these had been the only things that were needed Mars would have been choked by the grain yield, despite the wind.

But crops also needed soil, something better than the sterile dust and

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sand which covered most of the surface of Mars. Where good earth existed the crops blazed up like ignited kerosene — not quite the grain we had known, for it had to adapt and be adapted to the new conditions, but still usable. There wasn't enough of this good soil, however. Half the people on Mars were kept busy on the land.

The other half was busy building. That was our job, for the most part. Except for Morgan we had no personnel problems in 94.

As I expected, Leslie's worry and dissatisfaction disappeared with her responsibility. "Now you can do the worrying, Bill," she said cheerfully, "and I'll make the sympathetic, understanding remarks. But you don't worry, do you?"

"Not more than I can help," I said. "Leads to ulcers. And who wants ulcers?"

Yes, Leslie was a simple, straight-thinking, sunny character. She wasn't capricious or moody. I suppose I'd try to cover up Leslie's faults if she had any, but really there isn't any covering-up to do. Back on Earth she hadn't always shown up too well, but that was when I didn't know her and she didn't know me. As we grew into each other's ways, it became almost impossible for us to have any serious disagreement, so long as I remembered — and I did — to tell Leslie every so often how much I loved her.

As for Sammy, he worked hard, made only the routine complaints and didn't seem nearly so certain now that it would have been a good idea never to have seen born.

"What's come over you, Sammy?" Leslie asked him once. "I haven't heard you prophesying disaster for weeks now. Did it take all the wind out of your sails when Bill got the lifeship down safely?"

Sammy grunted. "Mark my words," he said darkly, "there'll be dirty work or catastrophe or tragedy yet. I don't know what's going to happen, but something will."

Though he spoke with his own pessimistic brand of humor, it was clear that he half meant what he said.

"The leopard," Leslie sighed, "doesn't change his spots, I see. But I think I know what's the trouble with you, Sammy. It's celibacy."

"Perhaps," Sammy agreed. "If you've got a dictionary, I'll tell you."

"Get yourself a girl, Sammy," Leslie advised.

Sammy's brow clouded for a moment, and I knew he was thinking of a girl who was dead now — but a girl he'd lost long before that. However, he rallied at once.

"You leaving Bill?" he asked. "I was wondering when you'd realize what a mistake you'd made. I'll think it over, Leslie. If I decide to accept your offer, I'll let you know."

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Leslie merely grinned. The three of us knew each other pretty well by this time.

The Stowes, Caroline and John, were very self-sufficient. They did all that had to be done without complaining. They were always ready to help anyone who needed help, but they never asked for help themselves. Caroline, like Leslie and Betty, was pregnant, but unlike them, she didn't like anyone to mention it.

"She's still Miss Wallace, really," Leslie commented, without malice. "One of those women who can be a respectable matron and an old maid at the same time."

I grinned, because the remark was so just. Nevertheless I couldn't help saying: "Don't be rude about Caroline, Leslie. Did I ever tell you she came to me in Simsville and begged me to take you to Mars?"

"Did she?" asked Leslie, astonished. "I always thought she disapproved of me. Incidentally, did that influence you?"

"No," I said. "You and she were already on my list at the time."

Leslie started to say something, then stopped. That was the only thing we still didn't talk about.

Jim Stowe was fourteen now, and with his first birthday on Mars he felt he was a man. He continued to be my personal assistant. His quick intelligence was soon known at all the stores and depots. I saw no reason to revise my idea that one day Jim would be a big man in the Martian settlement.

Harry Phillips was the same as ever, kindly and slow and phlegmatic. He couldn't smoke a pipe or drink a reflective halfpint of beer any more, but that, which one might have thought would have taken half the savor out of life for him, didn't seem to bother him at all.

"Guess if I had a smoke now I'd wonder what I ever saw in tobacco," he said philosophically. "And I don't think I'd like the taste of beer any more. Been telling myself that, anyway. I've got more than halfway to believing it, too."

I tried several times to get Harry transferred to an agricultural unit, where he would be much more useful. However, the work party system was working so well that nobody wanted to break up any of the units if it could be helped. And Harry said that in the circumstances he'd just as soon stay with us.

I didn't see much of little Bessie these days. Young children were given jobs at the research station, making things, sorting things, running errands. It would be a long time yet before there was school again for the children. When there was, Leslie and Caroline would be back at their old job, teaching.

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Anyway, I knew Bessie would be happy. She always was.

That left only Betty and Morgan.

Betty put up a brave show. She always pretended she was perfectly happy and that Morgan and she got on very much as Leslie and I did, or the Stowes. We pretended to believe it.

Morgan continued to do only what he had to, sketchily, resentfully, without pride or interest in it. He couldn't be trusted to do anything on his own.

"Listen, Morgan," I said to him on one occasion. "Nobody's trying to make you do more than your fair share. I know you don't want to do this — think any of us do? Why we're doing it is so that we can all be comfortable again. We —"

"Shut up," said Morgan harshly. "I may have to work, but I don't have to listen to you."

"What's gone sour in you, Morgan?" I asked curiously. "Tell me: was I right to pick you for my lifeship crew, or did I make a mistake? Were you a cheap chiseler back on Earth too?"

That got under his skin. He flushed a dull red down to his shoulders. I was glad to see that, not because I wanted to get under his skin but because a man isn't hopeless so long as you can.

He didn't answer.

"What's eating you, Morgan?" I persisted.

"I'll tell you," he said suddenly, passionately. "I've heard you talk about human rights, but you still act the little dictator. You always have. We had to lick your boots back in Simsville — you had all the power, with nobody to check on you. On the lifeship you kept on being the big boss. Well, now I'm good and sick of you. I'm sick of being pushed around and worked like a slave and never being left alone. I didn't come here to be a slave. Who are you to talk about rights?"

I didn't remember talking about human rights, but I might have and this was obviously one of Morgan's sore spots. I could tell that from the way he suddenly dragged the question of human rights from nowhere and got angry about it.

"Sometimes human rights have to be suspended for a bit," I said coolly. "Particularly such human rights as sitting on your backside and letting other people do the work."

Betty came along then. I tried to continue the discussion, but Morgan so obviously resented my bawling him out in front of Betty, as he considered it, that I shrugged and left them.

There was something in what he said about my being a dictator. I had to be. When things are grim, people have to be put in charge, people who say

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"Jump" and make sure everyone jumps without reporting in triplicate on their methods to some central bureau of justice.

The truth, I suspected, was not that Morgan was worried over the principle of the thing, as Sammy, say, might have been. Morgan didn't really mind someone giving the orders and cracking the whip to make sure they were immediately obeyed.

Morgan wanted to crack the whip himself.

I referred to the only law there was higher than the lieutenants — the council which Sammy had told me about when I was still in the hospital. His description hadn't been unfair. Winant was governed by the original colony committee plus the leaders who had emerged from the complements of the big spaceships, plus a few of the lieutenants themselves — never very many, not because we didn't all have the right to sit in on council meetings, but because there were seldom very many of us free to do so.

The council's advice on Morgan was merely: "Beat him. Starve him." It wasn't inhuman advice, it was inevitable. We were still fighting for our lives on Mars. Anyone among us who didn't pull his weight had to be kicked in the teeth until he did.

I tried docking Morgan's rations, without effect. Betty, I knew, was sharing hers with him, and I could hardly punish her too. I tried to make her see that Morgan must be brought into line, but as Leslie said: "That argument wouldn't have any effect on me, Bill, so why should it sway Betty?"

Sammy was surprised I didn't try the other suggestion. "I always thought you were a hard nut, Bill," he said. "But now when Morgan needs a swift kick in the pants, you won't give him it."

I shrugged. "I'd beat anyone else, including you," I told him, "but I don't think it'll do Morgan the slightest good. He'll only resent it, hate me, hate everybody, and try to get even."

"He's doing that anyway," said Sammy, "so I don't see what harm it can do."

Morgan had taken up with an old acquaintance of mine, Alec Ritchie, who had just been discharged from the hospital with his leg in plaster. I remembered Ritchie showing interest in anyone who made a nuisance of himself.

"I never liked Ritchie," Sammy told Leslie and me. "Now that he and Morgan are hanging around together I know I was right."

I grinned. "Talk about bias," I said.

"No, I'm talking about Ritchie. Another thing. I don't like the way Morgan's been looking at Aileen Ritchie."

"Why, are you casting covetous eyes on Aileen?" demanded Leslie.

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"Just the words I was looking for," said Sammy. "Not that *I* am. Morgan is."

"Is what?"

"Casting covetous eyes on Aileen Ritchie."

"But he can't . . ." Suddenly Leslie realized that he could. Marriage didn't really count any more. Strictly, Betty and Morgan weren't married anyway. Neither were Leslie and I.

"Oh Lord," I said, seeing more trouble.

"That would be the end of Betty," said Leslie vehemently. "She'd kill herself. I know that's crazy, but it's true. The poor kid still worships the ground Morgan treads on."

"I know," said Sammy. "That's why I don't like it."

"But Aileen wouldn't be such a fool . . ."

"Let's hope not," I said. "But frankly I don't see any happiness for Betty until Morgan does leave her. She certainly isn't happy with him."

We were uncomfortably silent after that. There was nothing anyone could do about Betty. Hers was one of those purely private tragedies which no one else can share or understand, and which most people prefer not to see.

I wondered what Ritchie could possibly want with Morgan.

IV

Occasionally as the weeks passed I remembered Ritchie's words and wondered if there was anyone among the fugitives from Earth who was just waiting for a chance to step in and take over Winant. It was possible. It made too much sense.

The big, clumsy, badly constituted council was all the government that was needed while everyone was still working fourteen hours a day. Keep people busy enough and they don't need a government. They don't need much law either.

Eventually, however, the situation would change. And what was being done to prepare for the time when we were no longer concerned merely with staying alive?

Nothing.

Nothing, at any rate, officially. Ritchie, of course, would be preparing. I didn't know anything of what his schemes would be, but I knew there would be schemes, all with the same object — the greatest possible power, success, comfort, safety and freedom for Alec Ritchie.

And if there was one Alec Ritchie, there must be more. Possibly Ritchie himself would be a complete failure, his schemes collapsing about him in

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ruin. But some other smart Alec, some bigger and shrewder Ritchie, might even now be planning a future the council didn't dream of, yet a future which could swallow ours. Ritchie had put it plainly and neatly, and possibly even truly. I'd seen something of the sort happen on Earth, often.

The slow, patient, stupid peasant spends 40 years saving enough to keep him in comfort for the rest of his life. And the smart, smooth, practised con man spends 40 minutes taking it away from him.

The small child slowly gathers a fine collection of shells. The bigger child acquires the whole collection by the simple method of taking it from him.

It's not so easy to take over a community like Winant as it is to take shells from a small child. Of course not. But does the peasant expect to lose his money? Does the child expect to lose his shells? No, and we were putting ourselves in line by not expecting anyone to become a dictator in Winant.

At that point I usually laughed at myself and thought of some more pleasant aspect of the future, like whether we were going to have a son or a daughter, and what we were going to call him or her.

There was no money in the settlement, and a lot of people, myself included, thought we could get on very nicely without it. When the so-called labor units came in, however, we lieutenants had to take notice of them. There were different kinds of labor units at first. The root idea behind them all was that people who wanted something made promises of one kind or another, the prospective seller insisted on having them in writing, and the buyer drew up a contract and signed it.

And before we knew it we had money again.

The principal thing that could replace money, of course, was service. People would promise, in return for something, that when they were able they would do some job or other. Sometimes the promise was to replace the article at some future date with another of slightly better quality. These promises were written down and became, inevitably, negotiable.

When we realized we had to do something about this innovation we were already too late to catch the first profiteers of the new settlement. Some cunning characters had been quick to realize the possibility of gain in this system. With their uncanny instinct for profit they had sold all they had to sell, plus a lot that they didn't, exchanged the tokens they gained for others, given out promises of their own, shuffled their gains about with the magical sleight of hand of the brilliant business man, sold them to the right people at the right moment, bought back their own

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promises, and generally kept things on the move — with each move meaning a little more in their own pockets. It was they who flooded the market with bad currency — promises which could never be fulfilled, by people who would promise anything — while the real hard cash, the tokens of the people who kept their word, was in their pockets.

We saw we couldn't stop this practise, we could only check it, standardize and administer it. We'd have liked to cancel all previous transactions, but we couldn't.

Lieutenants became bankers as well as all the other things they had to be. Came the one labor unit, representing certain stated service, the five labor unit and the ten. We forbade anything above the ten, at first. Labor unit became labit, then laby. We had abandoned dollars, francs, pounds, marks, pesos, lire, rupees, kroner, rubles, and acquired, to replace them all, the laby. Every laby had to represent a genuine promise of service, and was countersigned by a lieutenant. It wasn't long before we were using watermarked paper, and money was back.

Close on the heels of this came another new factor connected with it.

Morgan didn't appear to work one day on the building we were erecting, but someone else, a Czechoslovakian who spoke very little English, came in his place. On investigating I found he'd been paid to do Morgan's job. He was satisfied; he was a tough, honest fellow who could do two men's work. One man's work he had to do for nothing, but he could get money for the extra work he did. He must somehow have arranged his freedom from his own party by getting through a lot in a short time.

I couldn't do a thing. I didn't know where Morgan got the money — he wasn't the kind of smart business man who could take advantage of any opportunity to line his pockets — but I could guess. Alec Ritchie, I was certain, *was* the kind of smart business man who could take advantage of any opportunity to line his pockets, and had.

That day was notable for more than the reintroduction of paid service.

Group 94 was being transferred to the excavations, now well advanced, and three of us went on ahead to see what we were going to have to do, while the rest, minus Morgan and plus his hired hand, carried on at the old job under Sammy. The three who went were Leslie, Betty and me.

Betty seemed unnaturally gay. She wasn't a talker as a rule, but on this occasion she talked so much that Leslie and I could hardly get a word in. I caught Leslie's inquiring glance once or twice, and wondered whether to ask Betty bluntly what the matter was. It would be something to do with Morgan, of course.

However, Leslie suddenly asked, when Betty stopped talking for a moment: "Are you feeling all right, Betty?"

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Leslie must have seen things I missed. I hadn't noticed anything physically wrong with Betty. But I knew Leslie was on the right track when Betty said swiftly:

"No, it's just the air pressure. I'm all right."

Human beings always have to have a handy excuse for everything, and on Mars the reduced air pressure was blamed for a lot of things it didn't do. Mars really had a relatively thick envelope of air, much thicker than anyone had thought before the first ship reached Mars. The only thing Mars couldn't do in this respect was make the air weigh so much. Mars had a surprisingly high air pressure, but it was well short of what we were used to.

Knowing this, people used it as an excuse for being tired, or stiff, or having a headache, or not wanting to work, or whatever it was they wanted an excuse for. But in actual fact it had hardly any perceptible effect on us at all, beyond reducing the boiling point of water so that what we used to call hot water ceased to exist except in a laboratory. Or rather, it had the same effect on all of us. We adapted to it, as we adapted to the reduced gravity. We couldn't help it.

So when Betty made the new but already old excuse I knew she was hiding something.

"You don't feel sick, do you?" I asked.

"No, it's nothing. Forget it."

Obviously it made her feel worse when we talked about it. I noticed now how she was a little unsteady on her feet. Since she wanted to talk about something else, anything else, we let her do it.

About two minutes later she reeled in a sudden gust of wind. I caught her, quite gently, and steadied her. But at my touch she stiffened and collapsed in a faint.

"Leslie," I said, "have a look at her. She fainted when I put my arm around her."

I paced about as Leslie bent over the girl. I was hoping fervently that this was nothing over which I would have to take action. I was quite sure that what I'd told Sammy about Morgan was right. The only hope for Morgan was that bit by bit he could be made to realize clearly and plainly what he was doing and see just how that conduct fitted, or didn't fit, in the fabric of the fight for existence of a tiny remnant of all the peoples of Earth.

I heard Leslie catch her breath sharply and knew that ignoring this wasn't going to be possible.

"I think you'd better have a look at her, Bill," said Leslie. There was fury in her voice which I had never heard before.

Betty was pregnant, but there was no sign of it yet. Her belly was

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thin and flat, and it was one big, angry bruise. There was hardly a square inch of white, undamaged skin below the waist. It was no surprise at all that Betty had fainted at a touch. How she could have come by those injuries I found it difficult to guess. I didn't think merely punching her could have done that.

Leslie was too angry to speak. I wasn't angry, after one wild surge of rage, just tired, disappointed and sorry. The man who could do that could do anything. He could have killed Betty; the fact that she was able to walk about and pretend nothing had happened wasn't his fault.

"Now I'll have to beat him," I said wearily, "and if we don't watch them day and night he'll take it out of Betty. Until finally he kills her. Then we can shoot or hang Morgan, and the air around here will be a little cleaner."

"He's not going to kill Betty!" exclaimed Leslie fiercely.

"I don't see how we can stop him," I said. "She won't leave him, even now. We can't execute him, or put him in prison, or extradite him. All we can do is wait till he kills someone, and then by ordinary, common-sense law we can execute him to stop him from killing anyone else. God, to think I did this. I could have done better by picking the first lounger I saw in the street —"

Betty stirred and opened her eyes. She looked up at us, searched our faces, and then suddenly felt the breeze on her skin. With a convulsive movement she sat up, wincing, and grabbed at her suit.

"Let me do it," said Leslie. She eased the garment carefully over the bruised flesh.

"I fell," said Betty quickly. "It was during the gale yesterday —"

"Hell, you're not going to cover up for Morgan now, are you?" I demanded.

"It wasn't Morgan. It was —"

"How did he do it?" I asked.

She capitulated. She burst into tears, crying as I had never seen a woman cry before. She didn't weep with passion, but with grief and misery and hopelessness.

Through her tears, in choked phrases, she told us what had happened.

Morgan had taken her far out in the desert the night before, just after sunset. He had told her she mustn't have her baby. If she did, he would kill it. She had been crying, begging, screaming, but he slapped her face until she was quiet. He asked her if she knew how to arrange a miscarriage. She didn't. It hadn't occurred to her that any woman had ever tried to arrange a miscarriage. Even slapping her face couldn't stop her crying and pleading again.

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He threw her down and started hitting her with a round stone, sitting on her chest to hold her down. Betty didn't know how long that went on. Finally he said "That ought to do it," and threw the stone away.

"But *why*, Betty?" said Leslie wonderingly. "Did he say why?"

Through a fresh flood of tears Betty said: "He wants Aileen Ritchie. He said he didn't want me and a kid I could say was his always hanging round his neck. Now I'll lose my baby and —"

"You won't," I said. "Not if you keep away from Morgan in future and don't give him another chance."

The tears stopped abruptly. "I won't lose my baby?" Betty asked incredulously.

"I don't think so. Morgan doesn't know a thing about it, which is just as well. Keep clear of him and you'll have your baby all right."

"But I can't keep clear of him! I love him."

I knew that. I'd thought about it already. I sighed. "Make sure he never has a chance to do anything like that again, then."

Betty looked almost happy. "Then we can forget all about it?" she asked.

Leslie's eyes met mine. "No, Betty," I said sadly. "We can never forget all about it. A man can beat his wife or throw her about a bit and it's nobody's business but their own. But when a man does what Morgan's done to you, it's everybody's business."

"Please," Betty pleaded. "Let Morgan and me —"

"No, Betty," I repeated patiently. "Do you want Morgan to kill you and your baby?"

When Morgan appeared that evening I waited until his paid deputy had gone, and then drew the whole group together in the husk of the building we were helping to erect. I wasn't dramatic. I told them simply what was going to happen and precisely why. Morgan went ashen and tried to run for it, but Sammy was right behind him.

I made Betty show them all what Morgan had done to her. I had to do that, because Betty was quite capable of denying, at some future date, that Morgan had ever assaulted her at all. At the gasps and cries and murmurs of anger that were loosed I surveyed Morgan to see if there was any sign of regret. There was none — only fear of what was going to happen to him.

Well, fear it would have to be, then. He would have to leave Betty alone because he was afraid to touch her, if that was the only restraint which could be put on him.

I didn't ask them to stay while I whipped Morgan. The only purpose in public punishment is to deter others, and the others didn't need deterring. Sammy stayed, that was all. I got Leslie to take Betty away.

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Sammy had said he always thought I was a hard nut. When I whipped Morgan I discovered quite definitely that I wasn't. Each time he screamed, and he screamed often, the sound crawled in my guts. I couldn't see what pleasure anyone could get in hurting other people. It made me sick.

I had to keep reminding myself, as I'd told Morgan again and again, that this wasn't punishment for the past, it was warning for the future. Any time he wanted to act like a beast in the future, I told him over and over again, he would have to decide whether it was worth being beaten half to death afterwards.

When it was over Morgan was moaning and crying together. I didn't blame him for that. I'd given him just about all he could take.

And once again I tried to drive the lesson home. "The next time, Morgan," I said quietly, "it will be worse."

Sammy and I left him. I wouldn't meet Sammy's eyes. I still felt it had had to be done, but I wasn't proud of having done it.

"If you'd carried on just a little longer," Sammy said, "you might have left him feeling so low that he'd have killed himself."

I stared at him in surprise.

"It would be much better that way," said Sammy moodily. "Morgan's never going to be any use to anybody."

I thought of that as an epitaph, and shuddered.

MORGAN SMITH

He was never any use to anybody.

For once, all the lieutenants were called together to vote on some of the big questions. It was time we had a properly constituted government. There was no question of that.

It was some meeting. There were nearly 2,000 present, in the biggest hall at the research station and in dozens of other rooms round it, hearing what was going on by a big public-address linkup. Every room had to have a sort of chairman to keep his group in order and not have the p-a system choked with babble.

One of the things we did was vote ourselves out of power, as lieutenants. Some of us were pretty fed up with the job, anyway; we had a little power and a lot of extra work. Others knew that though they might have been the right men to command lifeships, they weren't the right men for the job they had now. We agreed that the groups of eleven, the lifeship crews, should stay units for the moment, but each should elect its own leader. Representatives would also be returned in the same way by the big ships' complements and by the members of the original colony.

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There was a long discussion about whether it was a good thing to keep representation in three groups like that. Somebody said we should have government for the whole population, not representatives who stood for the special interests of different groups. But it was agreed in the end that there were no special interests. It no longer mattered whether people had been on Mars all along, or had come in the big ships, or in the lifeships.

We were building a new council from scratch, at last, instead of trying to patch up some existing organisation.

Nobody imagined it would be perfect. It would be better, that was all; the next council, we hoped, would be better still.

We might have gone back and held our elections right away, so that it would be the new council who settled the other problems we had before us. However, on another vote we decided that rather than throw the new council in at the deep end we'd give them something to work on and amend. We'd make the decisions and go on giving the orders for a week longer before throwing the council open to everybody. We had some experience of command, after all. The new members would have to learn how to apply it.

We agreed that the laby system was out of our control. We could avoid what might be called inflation and deflation, that was all.

Marriage was abolished temporarily. There had been a lot of trouble over that, people wanting someone to marry them, people wanting someone to give them divorces, people living together without marriage, people formally married sneering at people informally married and saying they were living in sin. It seemed that the best answer was not to elevate informal marriage and give away or refuse divorces, but at one bold stroke to destroy "immorality" and leave sex relations to — of all things — common sense.

Then there was another long discussion on the problem of language, race and nation.

Our 20,000 plus was composed of white men, black men, brown men and yellow men, speaking English, French, Chinese, Russian, German, Italian, Arabic, Swahili and scores of other languages. Agreement on English as the standard language was surprisingly easy, but agreement that the other languages should die was as difficult as anyone would have expected.

You couldn't blame the Spaniards, with their Cervantes, the Greeks, with their glorious classical age, and the Germans, with their Goethe and Schiller and Heine, for objecting. I don't have to put their case, it's so obvious. However, the case for English not merely as the standard language but the *only* language was pretty good too. Without language barriers we'd have a much better chance of real unity than Earth ever had.

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We didn't settle that question. It was clear we couldn't, just then. But it would probably work itself out. If people had to speak English to be understood, the other languages would die, year by year, generation by generation.

Again, it was with surprisingly little trouble that we agreed that mating between any female and any male should be permitted, outside the blood relationships which would exist again in the next generation. Some of the Americans, Germans and Africans were violently against miscegenation. The French didn't give a damn. The South Africans and Australians wouldn't even talk about it. The English thought it would be a good thing, in theory.

And it was in theory that we agreed on it. We couldn't solve a problem like that merely by voting on it. But the vote meant that we hoped the Martian colony would one day comprise one people and one race, speaking one language.

It all sounded very fine.

We decided to go on as at present with soil preparation and building as the two overall priorities. We formed a banking unit to supervise laby transactions, a medical unit to check on a few new (fortunately mild) illnesses that were appearing in the new conditions, and an exploration unit to survey Mars, chiefly for rich soil.

V

Came the day of the great storm, which modified most of our plans.

It started like any ordinary gale. I was out alone, about half a mile from the research station, looking for another vein of the red rock we'd been using. When the wind started I dropped flat. Usually the winds didn't last. You waited for a calm period and then made for shelter.

The first indication I had that this wasn't an ordinary wind was when I was lifted like a feather, whirled in the air, swept along about twenty yards, and then dashed to the ground. I was lucky in being dropped on one of the thickest patches of lichen. I was only jarred from top to toe. No bones were broken.

Presently I wasn't so sure that I had been lucky in my landing-ground. The lichen offered no purchase at all. At least the rocks were something to hang on to. Another gust came and I was lifted again. I spun crazily, touched the ground with one foot, somersaulted and bounced off the lichen again. I was bowled along, half lifted, half rolled, for fully a hundred yards. This time, however, I came to a stop against a spur of rock to which I clung grimly.

The gale, insofar as it had direction, was coming from Winant. Fairly

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safe for the moment, I looked to see what was being blown from there — and there was plenty. There were sheets of metal, tarpaulins, doors, bits of masonry — and people, little black, struggling things whirling like confetti from an electric fan. I was thankful that my group was working in the vast hole in front of the station. They would be safe, if anyone was.

A naked body shot past me, twenty feet in the air. I knew the man was dead, because his head was flapping from side to side like a flag. He still wore his shoes, but his suit had been torn off him. Fifty yards to the right a woman was swept past. She was still alive — she saw me and made a wild gesture of appeal. I could do nothing, of course. The only hope anyone had in a storm like that was to find an anchor, as I had done, and stay put.

Just for an instant, and then it was gone, I heard a distant crash. I scanned Winant, my eyes stung by the wind, streaming with tears. The gale had actually lifted a lifeship and cast it down again across half a dozen others. As I looked, another lifeship was torn loose and spun crazily along across the plain.

I wondered if this was going to be the end of it all for Winant and for the people from Earth. My arms were aching; an extra-strong gust and I should be swept away again. No one else could be in much better state except the people in the pit, and those in the station itself. Even if the storm stopped at once, the toll must be enormous.

The fate of the community depended very largely on the number of people who happened to be in the pit and the station at the time. I had no up-to-date information on who was working where. If there had been only 1,000 actually at the station and 50 in the pit — which was possible — Winant might drop in one day below the critical level for survival.

As if to show that even the people in the pit weren't safe, the wind suddenly threw up a vast black cloud of dust which completely obscured Winant. Hundreds of tons of dust and sand must be showering into the excavations.

I was trying not to see the things and people flying past me. Winant I could do nothing about, but it seemed that I should at least try to help the poor wretches who were blown past, helpless, most of them dead but some all too obviously still alive. I felt guilty because I was safe.

In a black shower what seemed like half Winant hurled across the plain two hundred yards away. There were cattle, helpless in the gale; men and women, clawing wildly at the air, desperately seeking something to hang on to; loose stones, clothing, and thousands of small objects I couldn't identify. As I watched, unable to look away, the whole dark cloud was dashed to the ground, disintegrated like a bombed house and swept on in a dozen streamlets.

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I saw one man grasp a rock as I had done. He took a firm hold with both arms. Just for an instant relief must have flooded him. Then a big, dark object which might have been part of a wall struck him in the back with such force that it broke the rock through him, and all together they swept on before the gale — masonry, broken rock and indeterminate pieces of animal tissue.

A youth whose mind must have given way flew past gracefully flapping his arms like a bird's wings and laughing in ecstasy. I watched him into the distance, still beating his arms as if he had discovered the secret of flight.

Far out to my right I saw a speck high in the air, higher than any debris I had seen so far. It had thin, waving tendrils that must be arms and legs. Abruptly it fell as the wind which had supported it died for an instant. I saw it plummet down almost to the ground. Then it was swept away again, only a few feet above the plain, as if the gale was playing with it.

When I looked back towards Winant I saw three people quite near me rolling in line across the plain, like a grotesque act in an acrobatic show. I started when I saw the middle one clearly for an instant. It was Aileen Ritchie. Dust blinded me for long seconds. When I could see again, two of the three were gone, but Aileen was clinging to the same spur of rock as I was, forty yards away. As I saw her, she nearly lost her grip. She seemed to be hurt, which was no surprise at all.

I had been able to ignore the people I didn't know, treating them as puppets in the wild, mad scene, no more aidable than the shadows on a movie screen. But crazy though it might be to move from my comparatively safe anchorage, I had to try to help someone I did know. I started clawing my way along the ridge to Aileen.

In two places the ridge was broken, the wind whistling through the gap. I'd have stopped at the first if it hadn't been obvious that, left unaided, Aileen was going to be swept away in a few minutes. I don't know quite how I did cross the two gaps. I certainly didn't walk, and I didn't crawl. I must simply have thrown myself across and grabbed the rock.

Just before I reached Aileen the thought crossed my mind that if it had been Morgan, not her, a problem would have been solved. I could have stayed put and watched him fight his battle with the storm and lose it. But I couldn't be sure that I'd have let even Morgan die. In a turmoil like that, a man might be insane enough to risk his life to save an enemy, simply to try to cheat the gale and because they were both human beings.

I reached Aileen and grasped her firmly. I had seen her often and nodded to her, but I had never actually spoken to her except for those few words in the hospital.

"Thanks," she gasped. "I couldn't have lasted much longer."

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"Let's get five yards back," I said. I could feel the words being ripped out of my mouth and swept away across the desert. "There's a safe place for both of us."

We made it with a struggle. The ridge was only about four feet high, but at that point there was a crack into which we could wedge ourselves. We jammed our legs in together and stood breast to breast like dancers in a ballroom. Aileen could lean back a little against the rock, and did. She seemed rather embarrassed. The situation was too serious for me to be embarrassed at all.

"Where are you hurt?" I asked.

"Arm, side and head, I think," she said.

I checked her injuries, but they seemed minor — minor, at any rate, while the world was being blown apart at the seams. She wasn't going to be able to use her left arm for a day or two, her fair hair was clotted with blood and she had a six-inch gash in her side — but what was that when hundreds of people were being dashed to pulp all about us?

"What happened to the rest of 92?" I asked.

"They're all right. They got under cover. I didn't quite make it. How about your group, Lieutenant Easson?"

"In the pit," I said. I grinned wryly. "In the circumstances, Aileen, I think you might call me Bill."

She smiled. "I suppose so, Bill. How long do you think this'll last?"

"Since nothing quite like this has happened before, any guesses I might make would be worthless. I'd have thought it would have been over long since."

Instead of its being over, we suddenly found ourselves enveloped in the dust-cloud of all time. We shut our eyes, not only to protect them, but because we couldn't see anything anyway.

The flying dust and sand pierced our skin like thousands of tiny needles. I felt a sharp twinge in my neck as a cloud of sand peppered it like buckshot. I put my hand to the back of my neck and it came away sticky with blood.

Then just as the worst of the dust-storm seemed to be over and I opened my eyes cautiously, rain swept over us, hammering our skin, beating on our temples.

Aileen's voice came to me from a long way off. "You don't mind if I . . .?" She straightened against me and put her arms round me.

I clutched her tightly. "I don't mind at all," I said.

In a few seconds we were awash, water running down from our shoulders to our ankles. I felt a stream from Aileen's knee transferring itself to my calf. Gradually the gray dust which had covered us was washed away, like chalk marks on a wall when a shower starts.

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Aileen was crying. Her tears seemed to surprise her more than they surprised me. She made a desperate effort to stop, and told me fiercely: "I don't know why I'm doing this. It's not because I'm hurt."

I understood, because I felt like crying too. I've heard of men doing it in storms on Earth, when their utter impotence is brought home to them. Here there was all there had been in storms on Earth, plus the insecurity and helplessness of being so lightly secured to the surface of the world by the weak, tenuous gravity.

The rain lasted only two minutes or so. Then the character of the wind changed. It began to come in sudden, incredibly fierce gusts, followed by comparative calm.

Aileen mastered herself at last. She cast a quick, ashamed glance up at my face, still clinging to me.

"Think nothing of it," I said. "It's enough to make anyone cry."

"I feel such a baby," she said vehemently. "If you weren't here I wouldn't last five minutes in this."

Out of the fog of dust which was still streaming overhead a huge, gleaming shape dropped abruptly. We couldn't move. We waited to be crushed to death, hugging each other convulsively.

However, its size had deceived us. It crashed down fully fifty yards away, broke in two and was swept away on the wings of the wind again. We didn't hear the sound of the crash at all. It was entirely dissipated by the storm.

"What was that?" asked Aileen.

"Lifeship," I said. I was thinking of how that ship had come safely from Earth to Mars, and had then been destroyed by a mere wind.

Suddenly the wind died. We were left feeling rather foolish, clinging tightly to each other as protection against a storm that no longer existed.

"Can that be the end?" Aileen whispered. It seemed natural to whisper.

"Probably, but while we're here we're safe. Let's wait until the dust settles a little. I'll have a look at that gash of yours, now that there's water to —"

"I'd rather you didn't," said Aileen quickly.

"As you like," I said equably.

"I'm sorry, I only meant —"

I grinned. "I know." I pried myself out and sat on the rock. Aileen pulled herself up beside me.

"Bill, I should have known better," she said humbly. "*Please* see if you can do anything about that gash."

"Stop apologizing, Aileen," I smiled. "And don't make an issue of it. I don't think you thought I thought whatever it was. Come on, I'll carry you to the hospital."

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"I can walk."

"Perhaps, but it isn't necessary. You realize that if I carry you I'm still only moving point six nine of what I used to have to tote around all the time on Earth?"

She chuckled. "That's so. All right, go ahead."

We lost our lightness of manner before we'd gone far. The ground was strewn with debris, human and otherwise. And a glance showed that the crops some of us had labored over were all destroyed.

"We can't say Mars gave us no warning," I said heavily. "There were light winds and strong winds. We should have been ready for an occasional much stronger wind."

I left her at the research station and went to the pit, refusing to look about me and see how much of our work was ruined.

The great storm killed 2,590 people and injured 6,000 more. It put us back where we started as far as food was concerned, and killed so many cattle that the remainder would have to be watched and tended and bred very carefully if the species were not to die out. It showed that only buildings as strong as the research station itself were of any use on the surface of Mars. It put an end once and for all to grumbles and complaints about

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working on permanent buildings. It demonstrated clearly to anyone and everyone how shaky our foothold on Mars still was, and how risky it was to relax until we had made it a lot more secure. It undermined the new laby system, since so many contracts which had been perfectly good the day before were now worthless.

In many ways the results of the gale were good. But no one would have wanted these things at such a cost. Besides, in one or two not so immediately obvious ways the results of the storm were not good.

One big change in plan was inevitable. Before this the general construction plan had been to construct fair-sized buildings around the research station and use the pit, the cave-homes, more or less for temporary housing. The ground-level building was the important thing and the below-ground-level work was stop-gap and experimental.

After the storm the plan was reversed. Flats carved in solid rock, reinforced by concrete and steel, and below ground level, were obviously much safer than buildings on the surface which, as had just been demonstrated, were very vulnerable while they were in course of construction. We would make a huge square a hundred feet deep, and build on only two sides. Later we could make it even bigger, and finally we should have a warm, sheltered garden all over the square, with comfortable, solid flats all round.

True, at first the flats would be makeshift. But that way we could develop in safety. By building on the surface we should always be at the mercy of a great storm like that first one.

Group 94 came through the storm unharmed. Once I knew that, I could help to assess the damage it had done with more equanimity.

Aileen wasn't seriously hurt. She was at the hospital only a few minutes. There were too many people more seriously hurt for the hospital staff to pay much attention to mere gashes and lumps on the head.

She came and tried to thank me for saving her life. Leslie interrupted her. "He enjoyed it, Aileen," she said. "Now he'll save your life any time he gets a chance, and kiss you again."

"He didn't kiss me!" Aileen protested.

"Why not?" Leslie asked me, puzzled.

"I don't like blondes," I told her.

VI

When the first informal election was held, I was voted PL. The word *lieutenant* had never been a good description — we had been called lieutenants merely to give us some sort of pseudo-military authority over the people back on Earth whom we were taking, or not taking, to Mars. We now be-

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came known as party leaders. But since that phrase had political connotations we didn't like, the initials were generally used.

There was no opposition to my election as PL, not even from Morgan. Morgan had been quieter, rather to my surprise, since I whipped him. He never did anything to suggest he regretted what he had done to Betty; in fact, there was all too little doubt that he was one of those compulsive sadists who could no more keep his hands off his girl than an addict could stop taking drugs. He and Betty still fought like wildcats, and of course Betty invariably came off worst. But there was never anything for which I could whip Morgan again. He always stopped short of doing her any real harm.

She would have a bruise on her face, and say it was nothing. Or there would be blue marks on her thin wrists. Once when she turned up with her arm and shoulder bandaged, I was going to go for Morgan again, whatever Betty said. But it transpired that this time he really had had nothing to do with it. She had been dashed against a wall by the winds.

The suspension of marriage didn't do their relations any good. Morgan didn't say outright that he was finished with Betty, but he made it clear that he didn't mind whether she stayed with him or not. Betty, poor kid, still loved the man.

I had guessed for some time that Ritchie was one of the leading profiteers, and that Morgan was tied up with him in some way. After the storm there was no pretence at all. Ritchie did very well out of the storm, and didn't mind admitting it.

With so many people dying, the whole laby system had taken a knock, since a lot of the contracts in circulation were suddenly valueless. Ritchie apparently followed out the time-hallowed process of forcing the market as low as it would go, buying all he could and then letting the market rise again. I didn't follow any of his transactions in any detail, but the general line was obvious.

"You're a reasonable fellow, Bill," he told me good-humoredly when I met him once. "You must know that when anything happens — anything at all — there's always something for a smart man to make out of it. Now, I'll repeat an offer I made once before. If you'd like to come in with me —"

"Ritchie," I said grimly, "you're a reasonable fellow too, in your own way, and you know damn well before you say any more that I'm not going to come in with you in any of your schemes."

Ritchie laughed as if I had made a very good joke. "That's what I like about you, Bill," he said warmly. "Cards always on the table, and no dealing off the bottom of the deck. Well, I'll be just as frank with you. From what I hear you saved Aileen's life, and I never like to feel I owe any man anything. So —"

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"So you offer me a chance you know I'm not going to take?"

"Yes," said Ritchie blandly. "You see, *I* think I'm making you a very good offer — or I would, if you'd let me. If *you* don't like it, and turn it down, that's not my fault, is it?"

I couldn't help laughing at the insolence of this cheerful rogue.

"Call it quits, Ritchie," I said. "I like Aileen, despite the fact that she's your daughter. I'll save her life any time. How did she come to be your daughter, anyway?"

"She takes after her mother," Ritchie admitted.

You could say things like that to Ritchie. It wasn't possible to insult him. Not only did he never seem to bear malice, he never did bear malice. And yet nobody liked him. People are hard to please, aren't they?

Sometimes he reminded me of a bland, attentive *maître d'hôtel* who had far more money than the people he served so gracefully and assiduously. His manner must have helped him a lot. He would always, I imagined, give the impression of wanting to lend you money, wanting to help you. And only afterwards would you realize how much helping you had helped him.

Sometimes, too, he reminded me of beautiful, experienced women who have really learned the art of being escorted. Women like that let you take them out, pay enormous sums for their entertainment, wine and dinner, take them home, kiss their hands, and leave you with the impression that it's been a wonderful privilege.

I kept finding and hearing of more and more people who in some way, to some limited extent, were in Ritchie's hands. Money was becoming, once more, a necessity, and Ritchie had money.

There were the work schemes, for example. Ritchie, still unable to work himself because of his broken leg, bought and sold labor, and nobody could do a thing about it. It was known that if you wanted a day off, Ritchie could arrange it. Four or five other people would work for you, by Ritchie's arrangement, and you would sign what amounted to labies for your day's work, plus something. Even if the something was very small, there was no telling how little replacing you had actually cost Ritchie. The men who filled in for you might be heavy debtors to Ritchie, doing the job to escape a little interest.

Of course it was crazy for anyone to agree to such a thing. Most of the people who did so knew that. This was how it came about that anyone ever did:

You get into a fitful sleep at last about two hours before dawn. You are wakened with everyone else, light-headed and gummy-eyed, stiff and sore, and you know you have a hard, heavy day's work in front of you. You think of going to the doctor, but unless you are genuinely ill that won't do you

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any good. You know there is a way you can have a day of glorious freedom, freedom to lie in bed if you like, go around and watch everyone else work if you like, go out and walk in the desert if you like. You shake your head and go out and work.

The next day the same temptation is before you. And every day, until at last you allow yourself just one day off. Ritchie arranges it, and it is glorious. All day you have no regrets. You are quite decided that as soon as possible you will redeem your labies . . . somehow.

That's how it happened. Ritchie was given a great chance by the inflexibility of our rules. They had to be inflexible. We couldn't allow people to do what they liked, when they liked, because there was far too much to be done. It had to be an all-out, enforced effort by everybody. Particularly after the storm had shown how acute and how immediate the problem of food and shelter was.

When the new council of PLs was elected, it met at once to decide a few more things which now had to be decided.

We passed a law that no one should be able to control more than a certain amount of laby cash at any one time. It wasn't a good law, and right away we had to make an exception in favor of the party leaders, the council members. Promptly Alec Ritchie was returned by his section as a PL.

The truth of the matter was that if there was to be law at all, there was no way of stopping the rise to power of people like Ritchie. The law is always blind; it protects the honest and the dishonest, the rich and the poor, the good and the evil, the intelligent and the stupid. And since it's better understood and better applied by the intelligent, the evil, the rich and the dishonest people, it always protects them far more than anyone else.

Morgan, with Ritchie's approval, wanted Aileen. But Aileen very clearly didn't want Morgan. She kept him at arm's length, and Ritchie didn't interfere.

The Ritchie situation had been inevitable. For the most part the people who had been brought to Mars were as intelligent and cooperative and good-natured as we could have hoped. The choice, however, couldn't be perfect; people like Ritchie and Morgan slipped through.

We accomplished a tremendous amount in a few months following the storm. When men and women realize that what they're doing is for their own personal safety, the job is liable to be done quickly and well.

Leslie's arm was completely healed. Like so many women in the settlement, she was doing her last spell of hard work before easing off in the late stages of pregnancy. Leslie was one of those rare women who could continue to be attractive right through pregnancy. Wanting the baby was part of it.

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Not being unduly concerned about her appearance helped too. But most of the reason was probably that Leslie was attractive, independently of being beautiful. She would have been attractive if she had been fat or had gap teeth.

Twenty thousand is a pretty big labor force, particularly when things are so easy to carry that cranes and trucks are virtually unnecessary. When a force like that is really working together it can accomplish wonders.

We dug out our cliff and our caves and moved in. At first there were 25 so-called flats in a row and eight levels. Then we dug out a similar block at right angles. For the first time since we left Earth a few lucky couples had something resembling a bedroom to themselves. And of course every time someone moved into a flat conditions at the research station were slightly better.

People are delighted at even a small improvement in their living conditions if there has been no improvement at all for some time. If they had been sleeping ten in a room, they found it sheer luxury when two went away and there were only eight left.

We seemed to have turned the corner merely because every month things were better. But there was no serious slacking-off. It might be very nice to be sharing a room at the research station with only seven other people, but it would naturally be better still if there were only six in the room.

Leslie and I had a room to ourselves. It wasn't finished; in fact, by some standards it would have been said to be barely started. It was a little bubble drilled out of the rock. It would eventually be the kitchen of the three-roomed flat we were at present sharing with two other couples. But we had no complaints; not after months of sleeping in a corridor at the research station with four other couples.

The 400 flats begun so far thus took about two thousand five hundred people. The one big building completed on the surface, already known as the barracks, accommodated 700. A warren of purely temporary caves, corridors, galleries and cubicles blasted and hewn in one of the cliff faces which would eventually be cleared away gave shelter to 1,200 single men and was thus called Bachelors' Hall. A similar temporary warren on the fourth side of the pit accommodated 800 single women, and was called Old Maids' Hostel, though not generally by the inmates themselves, who had other ideas. The lifeships behind the research station still housed about 2,000, and the other spaceships a further 1,000. All that came to 8,200, leaving not much over 10,000 to be housed at the research station. And since it had been built for 7,000 people, we weren't too badly off all round.

A day came when we had another storm, not quite so fierce as the great storm, but out of the same stable, and no one was killed. About fifty people

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were injured. That was all the storm could do. It didn't put work back at all.

There was general rejoicing. In a few months more we would be ready for another great storm. We should be able to snap our fingers at it.

Suddenly most of the women were having babies. They all dated from about the same time — the moment, on the lifeships, when it must have been clear to the lieutenant in charge how little chance there was of landing safely on Mars. It wasn't clear whether these children had been conceived in wild, unreasonable hope or in complete despair.

Aileen Ritchie came to see us one evening after work.

"Hello," said Leslie, rather surprised. "You want to see Bill about something?"

"No," said Aileen. "I trained as a nurse once. I wondered if you could use some help?"

"Thanks," said Leslie warmly. "Caroline's supposed to be looking after me, but it won't be long before she has her baby too. We'll be glad of your help."

All sorts of arrangements had been made to deal with the situation. However, no matter how efficient the arrangements were, there were too many women having babies at once for the comparatively few doctors, nurses and midwives to deal with them all. The strong, healthy girls like Leslie would have to have their babies with such half-qualified assistance as they could get. Betty was another matter. She was already at the hospital under the doctors' eyes. Betty's labor wasn't going to be easy at best. She was too thin and frail and narrow-hipped.

I had had no particular worries about Leslie, largely because she obviously wasn't worried herself. I was glad to see Aileen coming to help, all the same.

We talked for a long time. Aileen and Leslie had long ago formed one of those casual feminine acquaintanceships which always puzzle men. They didn't seek each other out, and Leslie never mentioned Aileen, yet when they happened to be together there was no restraint between them whatever and any male in their company was apt to feel neglected. They were like each other, they understood one another, they didn't have to explain things, and they were friendly without being wildly enthusiastic about each other. Aileen and Leslie acted rather like some sisters-in-law I had known who got on well together but didn't see each other much.

They certainly had one of those mysterious feminine alliances which exclude all males and quite a few females. Half the time when they were talking I didn't know what was going on. It's good for a man to see his wife as a partner in such an alliance now and then — keeps him from coming to the dangerous conclusion that he knows all there is to be known about her.

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Another thing is that men together and women together have different standards of what they tell each other and what they don't. There are things men don't tell men and things women don't tell women, but they don't coincide. I was startled at some of the things Aileen and Leslie casually told each other, and puzzled when, obviously by mutual agremeent, they avoided things that men would have made no bones about discussing.

I left them after a bit and looked in on Sammy at Bachelors' Hall. I told him about Aileen, of course. I always tried to mention Aileen in a favorable light to Sammy, which was easy enough because I had never heard or seen anything against her except that Alec Ritchie was her father. I had no real intention of playing matchmaker, but I could see no reason why Sammy and Aileen shouldn't get together.

Sammy had been crossed in love, and took it hard. He had never said a word about the incident, or the girl — all I knew about it I'd heard from old Harry Phillips. Since then he'd behaved in a perfectly normal, friendly way with Pat Darrell, Leslie, Betty and every other girl with whom he'd come in contact. But he seemed to have formed no attachments whatever.

He was pleased with the way things were going, like most of us. "Just two more months without anything serious going wrong," he said jubilantly, "and our troubles will be over."

"Why this high optimism?" I asked. "Can't you think of anything that might go wrong, Sammy?"

"I can think of a dozen things, but I don't think any of them are likely."

So as I left Sammy, thinking Leslie and Aileen had had long enough for their heart-to-heart chat, I was reflecting that things must be even better than I had thought if Sammy was so confident.

However, Leslie was alone and frowning thoughtfully when I reached our flat. "What's the matter?" I asked.

"Aileen isn't happy," she told me bluntly.

"Why not?"

"She's beginning to hate her father. And she's afraid of Morgan."

"Aileen? I think she's making a mistake, both times."

"How do you figure that?"

"Morgan isn't really big enough to be afraid of. He's a nuisance rather than a real danger."

Leslie shook her head rather impatiently. "We've been through this already. He's only a nuisance to you. But to Betty or Aileen, or anyone else weaker than himself, he can certainly be a danger. How about Ritchie? Why is it a mistake to hate him?"

"Nobody likes him, but he doesn't actually interfere with anyone. He hasn't interfered with Aileen, or me, or you, or Sammy, or anyone else we

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know. If he did it would be different. Why hate a man who leaves you alone, who —"

"You're talking nonsense, Bill," said Leslie warmly. "I suppose you'd say if a man threatened you with a gun, that was nothing, that didn't matter, until he shot you?"

I grinned. "That's hardly an exact parallel, is it, honey?"

"Maybe I'm not logical," retorted Leslie, "but I'd rather be right than logical, any day. And I think I'm right about Ritchie, and that Aileen's right. . . . But one thing at a time. Let's go back to Morgan. You say Aileen hasn't any reason to be afraid of him. Suppose you were Aileen. Would you like to be Morgan's girl?"

"She doesn't have to be."

Leslie appealed to the heavens. "Look, Bill. Didn't you people realize what you were doing when you abolished marriage?"

"What?"

"You were abolishing all sex crimes. There couldn't be any crime connected with sex any more — rape, adultery, bigamy —"

"Hey, wait a minute. Assault's still a crime."

"Is it? Suppose Morgan just carries Aileen off, like a caveman. Who's to stop him?"

I started to say something, but Leslie was in full cry. She very rarely got worked up over anything. When she did, however, she could swamp most people. She had quite enough intelligence to make all the right points, when she cared to use it. I could just see her as Portia in the trial scene.

"Betty doesn't matter," Leslie went on warmly, "since by abolishing marriage you've abolished bigamy. Aileen would say it was assault, Morgan and Ritchie would say there was no assault about it. And who would Aileen appeal to? Ritchie's her PL. The captains wouldn't pay any attention. They haven't any sympathy for people who want to stay single.

"So any time Ritchie decides to back Morgan, Aileen becomes Morgan's girl whether she likes it or not. Use your imagination, Bill. Don't just say it can't happen. It can. It will. Aileen's already asked to be transferred to some other group, and been turned down. What now?"

"I told you," I said patiently, "that Aileen didn't have to be Morgan's girl if she didn't want to, and I meant it. She can take Sammy instead."

"Say that again."

I did. Curiously, Leslie didn't seem to have thought of that. She hesitated for a moment, put off her stroke. Then she murmured: "That's the first sensible thing you've said."

Leslie had done us an injustice when she hinted the lieutenants didn't know what they were doing when they abolished marriage. We were a peo-

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ple struggling to live, a people which must grow stronger and bigger. We couldn't afford to be concerned about the moral niceties of civilization. We weren't going to argue over bigamy, adultery, divorce, remarriage, desertion and all the rest of it.

The only thing that did still deserve some attention, we thought, was the case where a man wanted a girl and the girl didn't want him, or vice versa. Sex freedom was all very well, but it had to be freedom for both. Laissez-faire isn't freedom — it's freedom for the strong, the determined, the persistent, and slavery for everyone else.

But someone pointed out that if A wanted B and B didn't want A, the answer was for B to find someone else.

So the PLs were told to deal sternly with assault, but with that principle in mind. In general, it was working very well. If someone, say, assaulted Caroline Stowe (not that that was at all likely, but the law must occasionally deal in hypothetical cases) and Caroline and John Stowe demanded justice, the man concerned would be very, very sorry he'd done it before the PLs concerned were finished with him. However, if some proud, beautiful girl, used to having her own way and determined to keep her figure the way it was, complained indignantly of assault, she was liable to be asked if she had some other man in mind, and if she hadn't, the offender was generally punished so mildly that he generally wasn't sorry at all.

I told Leslie some of this and she agreed that the lieutenants hadn't been such fools after all.

"We can hardly allow people to wait around for years to fall in love," I said. "I don't expect Sammy and Aileen are in love, or anything like it. This is a different kind of community from the one we left, and they both have sense to realize it. If they don't dislike each other —"

"I'm away ahead of you," said Leslie calmly. "We'll send them out tomorrow night before it gets too cold, to hold hands and generally get acquainted. You talk to Sammy first and I'll talk to Aileen. And maybe we can get the Morrisons in the next room to move out to one of the new flats lower down, more sheltered."

So after all this time of solitary grieving, drinking, hoping, fearing and working, Sammy found he had a girl. It was a queer, bittersweet situation, the sort of thing that would naturally happen to Sammy. For there was no pretence about it — Aileen merely wanted a protector. She still thought she might be forced in the end to take Morgan, and she wanted to devalue herself, like a man gambling away a property because he hated the people who were going to inherit it. She would live with Sammy, but she told him — in our room, before they went out — with somewhat unnecessary frankness, I thought:

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"I don't pretend I'm going to love you, Sammy."

She smiled at him candidly.

"That's all right," said Sammy, with similar frankness, "I don't think I'm going to love you either."

They laughed. "Well, anyway, you'll be better than Morgan," Aileen observed.

"If that's the best you can say for me," retorted Sammy, "I want a divorce."

They may have been more tender under the stars, when they went out to get acquainted. I didn't see how they could help it. When they had gone, I permitted myself for a moment to imagine myself in Sammy's place . . .

"Enjoying it, darling?" asked Leslie tartly. I hear I'm not the first man to discover his wife is a telepath.

"I was just thinking," I said, "that on the whole I'd rather have you. Shall I tell you why?"

"Yes, please," said Leslie.

Later she said: "As a matter of fact they've been darned lucky, both of them. I don't know why either of them has been allowed to hang around single for so long, waiting for us to rub their noses together. As for the fact that they've only just met — you always claimed that you weren't in love with me, didn't you?"

"That," I said, "was when I was young and foolish."

Sammy and Aileen were as matter-of-fact about living together as they had been about discussing it. The Morrisons didn't move, but another couple near us did, and Sammy and Aileen moved in at once.

Aileen insisted on taking Sammy's name. "I don't like Hoggan much," she said, "but I like it a lot better than Ritchie."

That was the first time she made any public admission of how she felt about her father. We didn't follow it up, for she didn't invite discussion of the subject.

Thereafter she insisted on people calling her Aileen Hoggan and always called her father Ritchie, as if trying to pretend that there was no connection between them.

But she wasn't allowed to leave 92. Ritchie was the PL, and PLs had a lot of power — quite apart from the extra strings Ritchie could pull. Why Ritchie wanted to keep her in 92 wasn't clear. Apparently he said nothing whatever about Sammy — no comment, no congratulations, no protest. He simply ignored the whole affair.

I still thought, so help me, that Ritchie was overrated. People kept muttering about what a bad influence he was, how powerful he was becoming,

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how essential it was to find some way of checking him.

Undoubtedly he was a bad influence, but how much did he really matter? Not very much, I thought.

Which shows that even I didn't know everything.

VII

It wasn't without reason that Leslie had said in those early days that there was always something worse on the way. Whenever you were over the hill — there was another one in front of you.

But we couldn't really rail against Fate, for every time we should have known about those hills. Every new thing we had to face was new only because we hadn't thought of it — not because we couldn't have known about it.

We should have known about the sun, back on Earth, long before we did, and we *could* have known; we knew some of it. We should have known that the lifeships we made could only be space buggies, and that it would be a labor of Hercules to get them safely to Mars. We should have known what would happen when a cold, dead world, its inner fires all but out, was suddenly and unevenly heated and thrown into climatic chaos. We should have known that people couldn't get on without some kind of exchange, and that our free, moneyless Utopia would soon be a glorious breeding-ground for power-mad economic emperors. We should have known that if we had breezes and winds and gales we might any day have to withstand a great storm which was the grandmother and grandfather of them all.

And we should have known, before they happened, about the murders.

It was easy, the way we lived, to murder anyone in the settlement. That was demonstrated in one short, terrible week.

On Monday night Gregor Wolkoff, a member of 67, was found knifed outside the main entrance to Bachelors' Hall. There was uproar and horror, certainly, but nothing to what was to come. No real fear. It was a crime of passion, obviously, and soon the killer would be found.

In fact, quite a few people I talked to stressed the utter stupidity of the murder rather than anything else. How could anyone think for a moment he could get away with such a crime, cooped up in a small space with 20,000 people, all of them watching for the faintest sign of the killer's guilt?

One of the reasons why Wolkoff's death was taken so lightly was that by all accounts it was no loss to the community. Some people, true, were horrified by the very fact of murder, which we had all thought we had left behind us. But most of the people who had known Wolkoff shrugged and said he was capable of anything and there might have been strong provo-

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cation. It might be a case of self-defense — though if that was so, we wondered, why was he stabbed in the back?

However, the situation changed completely after Wednesday night, when Jean Martine was found in the shadows among the parked ships, stabbed in the same way.

Jean Martine wasn't a member of a lifeship crew at all. He had been third navigator in one of the regular spaceships, and was of quite a different type from Wolkoff. He was young, popular, good-looking. Nobody knew anything against him. He had a girl, and no one knew of any other love affairs.

Aileen came flying into our room soon after we heard about this second murder, breathless, wild and scared.

"Ritchie's behind this," she gasped. "What am I going to do?"

We couldn't get anything coherent out of her for quite a while. She was obviously hysterical, and I wondered whether I should slap her. But there are some girls you hesitate to slap, and Aileen, for me, was one of them. Leslie tried to soothe her, but without much success.

Sammy came in, saw Aileen and said mildly: "Thought you'd be here. Aren't you supposed to be looking after Leslie? Seems she's looking after you."

Whether Sammy's handling of the situation was good psychology or not, it certainly had the desired effect. Aileen gulped and shook her head to clear it.

"You think I'm crazy," she said. "You don't know Ritchie. I do."

"How do you know he's concerned?" I asked.

"Because I know him," she said bitterly.

It's a funny thing, but when people are hysterical, particularly women, you discount what they say, even when, as in Aileen's case, you know perfectly well they aren't given to hysteria. We said soothing things, but if among them there was any admission that she was probably right, it was merely because that seemed expedient.

Two days later, everyone was saying that Ritchie was behind all three murders.

That third one did it. The man who died was PL Venters, a known opponent of Ritchie, one he had never managed to pacify, involve or cow. And suddenly it became obvious that the three murders were a part of some plan for power, and that the planner must be Ritchie. Now that it *was* obvious, people remembered that Ritchie and Wolkoff had been seen together a lot, and that Martine had spoken violently and tellingly against Ritchie. They also pointed out that though Ritchie had provided himself with an alibi for all three murders, Morgan Smith, his known ally, had no alibi at all.

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Public opinion is often wrong, but I didn't think it was wrong this time. Now I believed Aileen. Now I knew I'd been mistaken about Ritchie.

So I was wrong. So Ritchie was a killer. So Aileen probably had good reason to hate him.

All I can take credit for is that when I knew I was wrong I admitted it fairly and squarely to myself and revised all my ideas about Ritchie and Aileen and Winant.

I didn't like what I came up with.

Some people wanted to string Ritchie and Morgan up without trial. If I'd been in charge of things, I'd have let them do it. We couldn't afford, yet, to be fair and impartial. It was, let's say, a sixty-five per cent probability that Morgan and Ritchie between them had killed all three people, and that was good enough. Even if we had the wrong people, this swift, decisive retribution might keep the actual murderers quiet for a long time. It wasn't the justice of civilization, it was the expediency of emergency.

Unfortunately, though, since we had such a big proportion of decent, fair-minded people among us, that was vetoed. Martian law wasn't going to start with hanging without trial.

"He knew that would happen," said Aileen listlessly. "Why don't people see that law doesn't prevent crime, it makes it easy for a clever man?"

The council passed a few more laws, and one of them made it clear that we weren't following the old principle of not trying a man twice for the same crime. We would try him, and keep on trying, until we proved his guilt or his innocence.

Then we tried Morgan and Ritchie for the three murders. We didn't even manage to make it look particularly likely that they were guilty.

But *they* did, by their attitude.

"You have nothing for us to answer," said Ritchie blandly, "nothing for us to deny, except that we murdered these three men. I can't speak for Morgan Smith; I can only say, for myself, I didn't kill any of these men, and you all know it. I don't see why I should bother to deny inciting Smith to commit a crime which no one has established he did commit."

"Why pick on me?" said Morgan resentfully, when he was called. "I'm only one of about five thousand people who *might* have stuck a knife in these three guys. Are you going to hang everybody who can't prove he didn't do it?"

And that was that. There was no evidence, let alone proof. We could only discharge them. We hadn't proved Morgan's innocence, but we certainly hadn't proved his guilt.

Nevertheless, a lot of people who had been uncertain before the brief,

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impromptu, abortive trial were quite sure after it. Ritchie and Morgan didn't act like innocent men. They acted, very deliberately, like guilty men who were quite certain their guilt couldn't be proved.

Unfortunately that wasn't evidence.

Very soon we found we'd played into Ritchie's hands. It was now generally known that he and Morgan were killers, and that nobody could do anything about it. He could use it as a threat. He did, almost openly. His power grew and grew.

Before this I'd never had any actual demonstration of his power. Ritchie had never really seemed any concern of mine. I had issued no contracts, nor had Leslie; there seemed no hold he could possibly have over us.

But when I made a serious attempt to have Aileen transferred to 94, I found out something of what Ritchie could do if he felt like it.

Leslie had her baby, a girl. We called her Patricia. The idea was Leslie's, not mine. I agreed without asking her whether she was thinking of Pat Darrell or not. At any rate, Aileen was so useful that Leslie felt we ought to do something for her, and what Aileen wanted was to get completely clear of Ritchie.

I thought her rather weak in this matter. You read of Trilbys completely dominated by Svengalis, but a normal person isn't so easy to dominate. All that was needed, I was certain, was that Aileen should take a firm stand and tell Ritchie firmly and without heroics what it was. However, there it was: Aileen thought she was in her father's power, and if she were to stop thinking so, someone else would have to take a hand.

I pulled all the strings I could think of to have Aileen declared independent of her PL, or transferred to another group, or anything else which would serve the purpose. Each time I was told, as I expected, "See So-and-So." On Mars people in authority were already back to the old game of refusing all responsibility, of passing the buck, of doing nothing rather than do anything wrong.

About every third time the person I was told to see was Ritchie, even if I hadn't mentioned Aileen by name. Apparently Ritchie had things arranged so that most changes had to be made, sooner or later, through him.

So I went and saw Ritchie. He had acquired one of the top flats, though he had no woman, and unlike the rest of us he had all three rooms. That alone showed his power, wealth and authority. He even had a stairway to the roof and had somehow managed to get part of it fenced off for his own private use. He probably saw himself as a millionaire with a penthouse.

Inside, too, there were many evidences of his special privileges. His flat was more nearly finished than any I had seen so far. He even had some rough furniture.

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I ignored all that and went straight to the point.

"Why don't you leave Aileen alone, Ritchie?" I demanded.

"She's my daughter, Bill," Ritchie said gently.

"She doesn't want to be your daughter."

"She can't help it. It's an accident of Fate."

"What percentage is there for you in keeping her tied to you?"

Ritchie spoke in the same gentle tone: "I told you long ago, Bill, it wasn't money that mattered, but what you could get for it. I'm going to explain myself to you, Bill. But first I'm going to tell you why I'm doing it."

He sat back comfortably and looked at me. He was in no hurry.

"Drink?" he asked casually.

I shot a puzzled glance at him.

He reached behind him and from a recess in the wall, produced a bottle and two glasses. He poured me out a drink and handed it to me. I sniffed it and sipped it.

It was raw, but it was alcohol.

"How the devil . . .?" I began.

"Just drink it," said Ritchie. "I'll come to that. I'm going to show you a few more things, Bill. I'm glad you came to see me. I was going to ask you to come anyway, one of these days."

He downed the liquor and poured himself some more.

"What I want," he said, "is what quite a lot of people want. But I can get it. They can't. I want to be able to do what I like, eat what I like, drink what I like. I want to do things just to show I can do them. This, for example." He raised his glass. "I don't really give a damn for liquor. I can take it or leave it alone. But I like having it made, keeping it here. I like being the only man alive who can have a drink when he likes."

He smiled happily at me.

"I sell it too, of course," he said reflectively, "on a very limited scale. And it's no use thinking you can report that and have something done about it, because you can't."

He put the bottle away again.

"Now you wonder why I'm telling you this," he went on.

"I think I know," I said bitterly.

"Perhaps you do. You're thinking of fighting me, Bill. I strongly advise against it. I hate to mention Jean Martine as a threat, but in some ways Jean was very like you."

If I give the impression that Ritchie talked like an oily villain in very cheap melodrama, that's about right. The only thing he lacked was the unreasonable anger of such stage types. I don't think Ritchie knew how to be angry. He was always friendly, even when he was threatening your life.

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He had only one record to play. Friendliness, good humor, pleasure in your company — however false it all was, that was the invariable background music to anything his words might happen to mean.

"Soon I will have a very efficient bodyguard," Ritchie remarked. "Even now — Morgan!"

Morgan Smith appeared in the doorway. He had a gun in his hand, and he enjoyed pointing it at me.

"This is crazy," I snapped. "You may get some scared chemist to supply you with alcohol, and there may be a lot of people who have made you silly promises, and you may control a lot of votes, but if Morgan shot me now a lot of people would dash in and you'd both be hanged. There's too much weight against you, Ritchie."

He nodded. "That's true. At the moment, anyway. No, if I really wanted to kill you, I'd have to arrange it another way. But it would be very little more difficult, Bill. You must know that. And I'm building up weight on my side. Morgan, send Edith here."

Morgan disappeared.

I got up. "I don't want any further demonstration," I said disgustedly. "No doubt this girl will do anything you like. I've heard your threats."

Ritchie held up his hand in protest. "Edith works here as a servant, that's all," he said. "As far as women are concerned, I'm highly moral, Bill. I'm sorry marriage was abolished. I'm not in favor of these loose sex relations. Soon I'll have marriage reinstated, and then perhaps I might marry. But that's not what I want to talk about."

"I don't care what you want to talk about. I'm going. I take it you insist on making Aileen miserable to prove you can do that, too?"

"I'll always see," he retorted coolly, "that Aileen will have no real cause to be miserable. If she insists on pretending to herself that she is, I can't stop that. Just a minute, Bill. I expect you're even more determined to fight me now. Remember you have a daughter and a wife."

"You're threatening Pat and Leslie?"

"And you," he added easily. "If you yourself are a nuisance, it'll be you I have removed. But I know better than to try to scare you on your own account. Remember your daughter and wife when you think of doing anything."

I turned from him in white anger. A girl, Edith presumably, came in as I went out. I paid no attention to her, but I did notice she wasn't pretty. Probably Ritchie was blameless from the sex point of view.

Possibly also he was no sadist, unlike Morgan. Perhaps his deals were straight, according to the business ethics of dead Earth. Perhaps in many other ways he was blameless.

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But none of that prevented him from being a fount of corruption, in a way I hadn't dreamed he was only a few days since.

Aileen was terribly right about Ritchie. She was right to be afraid of him.

Ritchie was still only a comparatively little man, despite his boasts. But there was nothing to stop him growing. He knew it. There would be a time when, if he and Morgan and I were placed as we had been, he could say casually, if he liked: "Shoot him dead, Morgan."

And Morgan could do it, then. Nothing would happen to either of them. Ritchie, by that time, would have things organised his way.

Only now did I really understand how vitally important we lieutenants had been back on Earth, what an enormous responsibility we had had, and how two of us at least had misused it.

Lieutenant Porter had brought Ritchie along, and I had brought Morgan Smith. Porter was lucky — he wasn't going to see the consequences of his choice. I was.

VIII

Betty didn't have a miscarriage, but her baby was born dead. We went to see her, expecting grief and hysteria.

We didn't see it. Betty was curiously calm and unconcerned. I think she had known all along that she would lose her baby, and that it would break her heart.

Leslie and I were silent as we left the hospital. Leslie wasn't back at work yet, but it would only be a day or two before she was. Eventually on Mars human beings would probably lose a lot of their physical strength through not taking enough vigorous exercise to develop it. Meantime, however, a person who would have been weak on Earth was quite vigorous on Mars.

We were silent because we had seen a girl who had lost everything, and because we knew what it had done to her. Betty was too heartbroken, too lost to cry, to be anything but calm and apparently unconcerned.

It wasn't what had happened to Betty that mattered. If Leslie had lost me and then her baby, it wouldn't have finished Leslie. She would have cried violently, been miserable for a while, and then started to build new things into her life to replace what she had lost.

Betty wasn't going to do any rebuilding. She didn't have Leslie's capacity for that. What wouldn't have broken Leslie or Aileen or Caroline had broken Betty once and for all, beyond repair. We knew that, and didn't want to talk about it.

Presently Leslie deliberately dragged her mind and mine off Betty.

"Now we must see about giving Pat a little brother," she said brightly.

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I protested. I had no quarrel with the idea in general, I said — not in the least. "But I want to have my beautiful wife for just a little while," I added.

I hadn't told her what Ritchie had said. I didn't see what good it would do to tell her.

A few days after Leslie came back to work, the food in the settlement began to improve. There could have been a general improvement before if the better supplies hadn't been passed on to pregnant women. Now there weren't nearly so many, and the diet of Winant in general slowly improved both in quantity and variety.

The exploration parties had paid off. They found no vast tracts of arable land, certainly, but they found a lot of little bits. Quite a few groups were taken away to work elsewhere — by spaceship, of course. That was the only means of transport we had.

The cattle were allowed to breed, and the older bulls were slaughtered. Eggs remained in short supply for a while as chickens were hatched. There still was hardly any milk, but it would only be a matter of time before there was plenty for everybody.

The weather was becoming much more predictable. For one thing, the climate of Mars was still settling after the big change which had come over it. For another, we were becoming more used to the signs, and what had been, at first, storms completely without warning now gave us enough advance information to enable us to gauge their intensity.

We eased off a little in our work. It was too hot in midsummer, as it was now, to carry on with the same backbreaking labor. And the urgency wasn't as great now. We had turned the corner as far as the agricultural and accommodation problems were concerned.

Instead of devoting all our energies to providing rough-and-ready new accommodation, we now had half our force employed on refining what had been started. Slowly the cliffs were being faced with concrete, the various levels reinforced, lined, floored. We were no longer primitive cave-dwellers. Our flats were beginning to resemble what we had been used to back on Earth. We couldn't paper our walls or finish them in wood, and we had no material for curtains or chair-covers. But we had plenty of plaster and paint, and gradually the right plastics were being evolved to replace the cloth and leather we wouldn't have for a long time.

Landmark after landmark was passed. We had electric light long before we had flush toilets and taps and baths. However, these came at last. For a time we had electric radiators in the rooms. Then these disappeared and the whole block of flats had an efficient electric heating system. Big windows were put into the front rooms. None of them opened. We weren't going to make the mistake which had been made so often in Earth buildings, the

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mistake of having two independent and incompatible ventilation systems.

There were no outside staircases. At one time we had had to climb to our caves over the cliff-face, and in high winds two or three people had been blown off the crude ladders and killed. Now there were ten broad stairways in the interior of the block. Soon there would be elevators.

Old Maids' Hostel was cleared away — there weren't many spinsters left. We now had five thousand flats at least started, some of them almost finished.

The future would have been bright if it hadn't been for Ritchie. He was undermining everything that was done. I saw that clearly, now that I had stopped underestimating him.

The work parties were gradually dissolving. I hardly ever saw Morgan now. I knew he was with Ritchie most of the time. And Aileen didn't have to have much to do with 92, or with Ritchie. Occasionally PLs had to report on their parties, and they were still held responsible for their people. However, the emergency period being almost over, there was more freedom for everyone. Whether it was a good thing or not, our daily life was becoming more and more like what it had been on Earth.

In the council it was becoming harder and harder to get anyone to commit himself over Ritchie. I could understand that only too well. I was only one of many PLs who didn't want to oppose him too conspicuously. I didn't fawn on him. There was no pretence that I approved of him in any way.

But I didn't dare risk Leslie and Pat.

Though Ritchie was as strong as an ox, he had never done any work in Winant. First there had been his broken leg, and when that was no longer an excuse he had got round a doctor and had himself declared unfit for hard manual labor. Later still he had too much power for anyone to be able to do anything about him.

His top-floor flat was now a well-appointed suite, at least five times as luxurious as any other dwelling in Winant. With him or near him lived Morgan and a dozen other men whom he seemed to control absolutely.

The effect of the luxury in which Ritchie lived was much more serious than it appeared on the surface. Everyone knew that Ritchie had started off level with them. They saw the gulf that had opened between him and them, and resented him, hated him, feared him, admired him, envied him.

Only two others in the whole community had accomplished anything remotely resembling what Ritchie had accomplished. They were Captain Giuseppe Bonelli and PL Smythe, both opportunists like Ritchie, though not in the same class.

However, it's not worth saying much about Bonelli and Smythe, for just about the time when they were coming into prominence, Ritchie had them murdered.

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Just like that.

This time, of course, Ritchie himself had an absolutely unshakable alibi. He had been on his sunroof with twenty other people, handpicked as reliable witnesses. Morgan didn't have so good a natural alibi, but he had a perfectly sound bought one.

Of course we were fools to let Ritchie get away with it. We should have strung him up without trial if we could. But who was going to be the ringleader in a scheme like that which might fail? Who was going to be known as the man who tried to get Ritchie hanged?

Not I.

One evening I met Morgan in the passages, and to my astonishment he grinned at me. I didn't want to have anything to do with him, but I was so surprised I stopped.

"Okay, Bill," he said. "We've fought long enough."

I waited.

"You brought me here," he went on, "and I'm grateful. I didn't like you when you could push me around. Now you can't. No one can. You can shake or not, as you like, and I don't give a damn."

He held out his hand.

"I'd shake, Morgan," I said, "if I thought we could both really mean it."

"What do you mean?" he asked quickly, with a flash of the old resentment.

"I don't think you can honestly shake hands in friendship with anybody any more, Morgan. And I'm sorry for it."

"I've got plenty of friends," he snapped.

I shrugged. "No doubt."

Quickly he recovered his good humor. The whole act was obviously based on Ritchie. Morgan wasn't with Ritchie because he was afraid of him, but because he admired him. Ritchie was all he wanted to be. And if Ritchie never took offence, Morgan wanted never to take offence either.

"All right," he said. "But there's no reason why we should snarl every time we see each other, is there?"

"None at all," I said civilly. "I'm not snarling."

And then on impulse I made what I knew was my last appeal to Morgan.

"Morgan," I said, "if you're carrying on the way you're doing because you think it's too late to do anything else — don't. You can always start again. Always."

"You mean —"

"I mean if you've killed men, that doesn't mean you must always be a killer. It's never too late. The people you're moving among now probably sneer when anyone says anything like that, but sneering at a thing doesn't make it false. It isn't too late for you, Morgan."

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He hesitated, uncertain. He had lost his angry defiance. He seemed to be open to reason again, which he hadn't been the last time I talked to him.

"What could I do?" he asked almost defensively.

"I don't know. You'd have to find that out for yourself. But you could do something. And Betty would help you."

"Betty?" He stared at me for a moment as if he didn't know anybody called Betty. Then he laughed, not bitterly but with real mirth. "Betty!" he exclaimed, and laughed again.

He was still laughing when Betty herself came hurrying upstairs. I looked at her in surprise. Instead of plain work clothes she wore a soft blouse and a long, pleated skirt which swung gracefully about her thin legs. She was very attractive.

"I was looking for you, Morgan," she said.

"Okay," he said. "Let's go." He grinned at me, and they went off together.

I went to our flat, puzzled. The last I knew of Betty and Morgan, just after she came out of hospital, they were complete strangers. Yet they had gone away arm in arm.

It looked as if Ritchie had changed his mind, and that knowing he couldn't have Aileen, Morgan was making the best of Betty.

It looked that way for just six hours. Late that night Aileen came quietly into our flat with Sammy. Though they were quiet, I knew at once that something was very far wrong.

"Ritchie has made up his mind," she told us. "I'm to marry Morgan — marry, you'll notice. I'm to do it willingly or else."

Leslie started to speak, but Aileen went on in the same controlled voice. "He didn't stop there. He told me or else what."

First, Sammy would die. Then Leslie. Then me.

Ritchie meant it. At first shrewd and careful, he was becoming drunk with power. He realized he had the power to do almost anything that crossed his mind — and what good was power if it wasn't used?

"He told me," I said. "He does things just to prove he can."

Aileen nodded. "He got the idea of marrying Betty," she said. "Yes, Betty. Your Betty. He wants to marry her and make her happy. So he's giving her everything she asks for, and —"

"Betty!" I exclaimed. "Then that's why she went with Morgan. What's her point of view on this?"

Aileen shrugged. "She doesn't care. She doesn't care about anything. I think she goes to the flat just to be near Morgan. That's over, really — even for her it's over. But she still has to see him."

She dismissed Betty with a gesture. "You know," she went on, "it never

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crossed my mind until tonight that Ritchie was mad. Even now I don't think he is, except in that one thing. If you do mad things, even things you don't want to do, just to show people you can do them, you're crazy, aren't you?"

"What happened, Aileen?" Leslie asked.

"It was a party. They got me there, and Sammy —"

"It was easy enough," Sammy said quietly, bitterly. "Morgan came and pointed a gun at us, and we went."

"Ritchie doesn't like wild parties," Aileen went on. "But then, you see, he was showing some friends and a few other PLs and some people he hasn't quite got in his pocket what he could do. It was the wildest party that anyone ever threw. Everything happened, short of murder. You were nearly there, Leslie."

"Huh?"

"Oh, you'd have come, just as we went. Somebody wanted you to come and dance naked —"

"For Pete's sake!"

"And you'd have done that too. You'd have realized it didn't really matter beside the threats Ritchie would have used, and meant. But Betty vetoed it. That was the only crazy thing that was stopped, though, and it was only half stopped. I stood in for you."

"You don't mean," said Leslie incredulously, "that Ritchie made his own daughter —"

"You're missing the point," said Aileen coolly. "Ritchie is the boss. Nobody shares his power with him, though he may give in to Betty on a point or two. I don't matter any more than anyone else. Only he matters. . . ."

"He *is* crazy," said Leslie. "I see the pattern, but it's a crazy pattern."

"Maybe. Anyway, we needn't talk about the other things that happened, sane or insane. None of that makes any difference any more, and Ritchie is going to stop being a nuisance or an emperor or a terror or whatever he is. If nobody else is going to do anything about him, I am."

I looked at Sammy, but there was nothing to be learned from him. He was looking broodingly at Aileen.

"Killing is nasty," said Aileen in the same quiet, controlled tone, "and killing one's own father is so much nastier that I didn't even consider it until now. But it's got to be done. Already he has guards. Soon there'll be more of them. I'm one of the few people left who can get close to him. You couldn't, Bill. Sammy couldn't."

She took a deep breath.

"I'm going to kill him, but I don't want to die. I don't think I deserve to

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die for it. Will you help me? Will you lie, knowing people will believe you?"

Sammy had called me a tough nut, and perhaps he had had some reason. I said without hesitation:

"I'll help you, Aileen. I'll lie."

Leslie and Sammy and I were watching, on the ground. Ritchie, Morgan and Aileen were on the sunroof — occasionally we saw one of them. With luck, we were going to see a murder.

The most plausible accident which could befall Ritchie was to fall from the sunroof to the ground. Everyone could believe in an accident like that — or make himself believe it.

"I wish I were God," Sammy muttered. "Then I'd know what was right. What an infernal situation . . ."

He stopped abruptly as we saw a head moving. It disappeared again.

The pit was now so deep that we could make out very little at the top. When people came close to the breast-high stone parapet we could see their heads and shoulders, and their legs through the spaces in the stonework. Unless they were close we couldn't see them at all.

In the circumstances there could be no warning. We couldn't see what led up to the incident we were to misreport. Our bias would be known, of course — but who would speak up for Ritchie? Who would be sorry if he died? Who would try to prove we were lying?

Presumably Aileen would be working patiently to get rid of Morgan, whom we knew to be present on the roof.

"It's a mad scheme," murmured Sammy. "Ritchie knows everybody hates and fears him. He knows Aileen would be glad if he were dead. He won't be such a fool as to —"

"Look!" Leslie screamed.

It looked as if Sammy was right. We saw two men and a girl struggling on the edge. What had gone wrong we didn't know. But clearly Aileen had moved too soon, made a mistake, given herself away — or Ritchie had been expecting her attempt, waiting for it.

Anyway, she was going to fail.

"I'm going up there," said Sammy desperately.

"Wait!" I said.

It was two men against a girl. Perhaps the two men, knowing that, were careless. Perhaps they forgot that though their strength was still overpoweringly greater than hers, the thrust of her legs was enough to raise all three of them quite easily against the 0.38 gravity of Mars.

Struggling in Morgan's grip, she lashed out with one foot. Through the gaps in the stonework we saw her leg whip up straight, so fast that it was

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a blur, and though a support blocked our view we winced involuntarily as her toe sank into Ritchie's belly.

On Earth that kick would have winded Ritchie, perhaps injuring him seriously. But this wasn't Earth. It lifted him perhaps two feet. He crashed back against the parapet, probably breaking his back. That didn't stop him, either. His legs came up and he somersaulted over, turning in the air.

Instead of watching the roof — for Ritchie was already as good as dead, and didn't matter any more — we watched him, unable to look away, even when he struck the ground sickeningly.

When we looked up again, Morgan had both hands on Aileen's throat, and from the way his shoulders were hunched we knew they must be biting deep. Morgan was loyal to Ritchie to the end, apparently. He wanted revenge for Ritchie more than he wanted Aileen.

Then with a lithe backward flip Aileen wrenched Morgan off his feet and her shoulders back over the parapet. She must have put all her strength into it. Morgan sailed over, screaming.

She went over too, of course.

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Sammy moaned even before they struck the ground. I knew what he was thinking. He had lost two women he loved, one on Earth and one on Mars.

Despite the horror of the thing, despite Sammy's pain, I couldn't help feeling a sense of relief. Even if it had to be grim and bloody and melodramatic like that, Mars was the better for it.

There was a thin cry from above. We looked up. Leslie gasped and shaded her eyes, screwing them up to see better.

"I think that's Aileen!" she exclaimed.

"Then who . . .?" I began.

"It *is* Aileen," Sammy shouted.

We waved to her, and ran to where Morgan had fallen. We winced as we looked at them. His hands were still round Betty's throat.

IX

We could only guess at Betty's state of mind. From the timing, she had obviously guessed what Aileen intended. Whether Betty had meant all along to kill Morgan or had done what she did in a sudden frenzy was anybody's guess. At any rate, she had sent Aileen inside for something, and when Aileen came back there was no one on the roof.

Very likely, as Sammy had said, Ritchie distrusted Aileen. But neither he nor Morgan seemed to have any distrust of Betty. We found it ironic, when we tried later to reconstruct the incident on the basis of all we knew, that Ritchie had probably been trying to save Betty from Morgan when she kicked him. Betty must have made some move against Morgan. That would probably only amuse Ritchie. He would have gone forward to break Morgan's grip. And Betty kicked him over the edge.

But these were only guesses. Aileen had meant to kill, and hadn't had to.

"I can't say I'm glad things have happened this way," she said. "I —"

"You can't say it, but you are," Sammy observed.

"I know *I* am," Leslie said. "Betty's life wasn't any good to her."

We still had big problems, we still had a struggle to live on a world that wasn't our own. However, it was nice to get on with it without the idea that we were in danger of being stabbed in the back.

Sammy was in a daze for nearly a week. The certainty that it had been Aileen who had died had really shaken him. It was no use pretending after that that he didn't love her.

"Why are some people ashamed of perfectly decent emotions?" Leslie marveled. "Do you think Aileen will laugh at you for loving her, Sammy? If so, you haven't learned the first thing about women — the very first thing."

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"Let us have no more talk of love," Sammy ordained. "Love is a feminine myth. It's always women who talk of love."

With Ritchie removed, the Martian settlement moved on more surely, more in step, more cleanly. No one took on Ritchie's mantle. Now that he was dead, people spoke freely about him and his works.

There was a startling change. Startling, that is, if you don't know human beings. Apparently Ritchie had had no friends. Apparently no one had ever liked him or supported him in any way. Apparently no one had ever been afraid of him.

The whole of Winant, it seemed, had been just about to put Ritchie in his place. There were suddenly all sorts of things which could have been done about Ritchie. Obviously, by being killed, he had merely escaped what would have caught up with him if he'd lived a few days longer. . . .

Lieutenant Porter and I had both made mistakes. Fortunately they canceled each other out in the end.

My group was what it should have been all along, a sound and healthy body of people. With Aileen in it, and Morgan out of it, it was a group of people who liked each other, could get on well together, and believed in the same sort of things.

"Of course," said Sammy, "this is only the beginning. Look at what we've had to face in the last year or so. Take the supremely optimistic view and say that this year things will only be half as bad —"

Leslie yelped involuntarily. "Aileen, shut him up, for heaven's sake," she exclaimed. "Sammy being supremely optimistic — like that — is just about enough to make me want to go away in a dark corner and cut my throat."

"I *am* being supremely optimistic," Sammy insisted. "Oh well, if you all want to live in a fool's paradise, don't let me stop you."

"I won't, anyway," said Aileen quietly. "There never is an ending, Sammy, we all know that. But there are turning points, and afterwards when we look back we see how we were going down and down and down, until something happened and we started coming up and up and up. I think that's where we are now."

"Well, sure," said Sammy. "Didn't I say that things this year will only be half as bad as they've been so far?"

"You belong in the Old Testament," Leslie told him.

I grinned. "And Sammy begat Ahab," I said. "And Sammy begat Rebecca. And Sammy begat —"

Sammy and Aileen fled.

"And Bill begat . . .?" Leslie suggested.

I think you could justifiably describe the way we kissed as supremely optimistic.

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In all of our capacities — as editors, as reviewers, as writers, and even simply as enthusiasts — we have been keenly interested in the problem of the possible fusion of science fiction and the detective story, and have occasionally flattered ourselves that we've made some small contribution toward its solution. But we now humbly retire before a scholar from across the Atlantic who, in one brief and incisive document, casts definitive light upon this debated subject.

Space-Crime Continuum

by H. F. ELLIS

"*He was killed,*" *grunted Dr. Polycarp, wearily stuffing his geiger-counter into his bag,* "*by epsilon rays, or some similar agency, fired from behind at a distance of not more than two light years. Tell you more when we've had him disintegrated.*"

"*Hmph!*" *snapped Philip Strong.*

I QUOTE THIS brief passage from my forthcoming interplanetary crime novel, *The Space Case*, to indicate the kind of difficulty that faces an author who tries to have the best of both worlds by combining detection and space-travel in one book. Alibis are the very devil. With the public demanding ever more up-to-date and powerful weapons — the old short-range uranium pistol cuts no ice nowadays — it is useless for the chief suspect to produce the stub of a cinema ticket as proof that he was on another planet at the material time. What of it? says the reader; the man could have bombarded his victim with beta-particles at twice the distance, without even bothering to leave his seat. And so he could. That's what Philip Strong had in mind when he went on to say, "*So, on the evidence thus far, we can't exclude* ANYONE *who has been within twelve billion miles of this place during the last two years!*"*

I'm solving this alibi problem, as a matter of fact, by the later discovery of indentations made by a meat chopper on the back of the victim's head

*Strong spoke loosely. See, in due course, my *Murder on Alpha Centauri*, where the whole case turns on an error in the speed of light made by a blundering local inspector.

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(they were put there deliberately, after death of course, by the murderer, in order to throw suspicion on an old-fashioned and rather earthbound Egyptologist); but the device is a little thin, and involves some tricky space-time adjustments as the plot unfolds. Nor is this the only, nor even the most difficult, hurdle that has to be surmounted. The whole science of interplanetary detection, as Strong often says, is in its infancy.

There is also the difficulty of ascertaining whether death has, in fact, taken place. The body of Sir George Trevose, the astro-physicist, is discovered slumped sideways in a Venusian deck-chair, with the uncompleted equation "$\log(-x) + (\text{Cos } v^2 s)^{2\pi n} = Rd\theta^3 \ldots$" scrawled in the meteoric dust at its feet. So far all is plain sailing. But what is Strong going to do to make sure that life is extinct? Rip open the front of Sir George's space-suit — and kill him for certain by letting in the carbon dioxide for which the atmosphere of Venus is notorious? The point, however, is elementary and need not detain us.

In the matter of suspects I strongly advise newcomers to this field of fiction to retain at least some of the traditional figures of Earthly crime. With the whole Universe to pick from there is a temptation, as I well know, to look for the murderer among such characters as Krool, renegade son of the Hepat of Mars, Tchah his radio-active butler, Coreopsis, Queen of Madusia, and the sinister Obal Trug, self-styled Gookwar of Bom. The temptation ought to be resisted. Readers lose their grip, if all the suspects are eighteen feet tall and have antennæ growing out of their heads, and tend eventually not to care *which* of them did it. Also it is difficult, without a certain artificiality, to assemble the whole lot in the detective's room in Albany, W.1, for the final show-down.

It is better, I think, to adopt some sort of compromise between the old and the new: —

THE SPACE CASE — A Philip Strong Story

Synopsis of Opening Chapters

The Author, uncertain whether there is more money in interplanetary or detective fiction, has decided to combine the two and accordingly attaches himself, in the guise of TONY BLACK, a typical first-person stooge, to the house party of LADY TREVOSE, wife of SIR GEORGE TREVOSE, the notorious millionaire astro-physicist and owner of the space-ship *Hermione*. Included in the house party at the Trevose's gloomy Shropshire seat are:

HUGH TREVOSE, Sir George's spendthrift son, threatened by his father with summary disinheritance if he does not immediately renounce his engagement to

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SEMOLINA, an unspoilt Venusian priestess, who is being blackmailed by a syndicate of former admirers and has to raise 10,000 *krim*, or the equivalent in terrestrial money, by Monday;

SIMON WARWICK, confidential secretary to Sir George and an ex-Olympic javelin-thrower, now under notice for stealing his employer's marijuana cigarettes;

PROFESSOR EIGG, a left-wing selenographer, whose plan to repopulate the Moon is being secretly encouraged by Lady Trevose. He is a gifted mimic, but his frequent threats against Sir George's life should not be taken too seriously according to

OOMPH, the half-crazed robot who acts as valet to the Professor and is subject to fits of homicidal rage if a rare South American lubricant, unknown to Western mechanical engineering, is poured into his gearbox.

When, late on Friday night, this likely lot is joined by PHILIP STRONG, a detective so well-bred as to be practically indistinguishable from a race-horse, the Author's sole remaining anxiety is lest the murder of his host should take place before he has had time to manœuvre the whole party into surroundings less hackneyed than a Shropshire library. To obviate this risk he (or rather Tony Black) suggests that a midnight trip in the *Hermione* would be fun. "Venus is nice at this time of the year," yawns Strong, and Lady Trevose, who has been stabbing absent-mindedly with a stiletto at a photograph of a Martian princess she has just found in her husband's desk, enthusiastically agrees. Nobody notices Semolina's preoccupied look . . .

It will be seen that I have kept all these suspects, and their motives, well within the bounds of the average reader's credulity; and it is upon *their* movements, upon the discovery of blow-pipes, cosmic ray projectors, etc., in *their* luggage, that the main interest of the story centres. Subsidiary characters — Venusians, the Scorpion-men from outer space, a comic Thwapa (or police-sergeant) who falls in love with Lady Trevose — are used purely to give local colour and relieve the tension. Their irruptions are not permitted to interfere with the development of the central theme, the solution of Philip Strong's problem:

Strong bent down and, carefully manipulating his hydraulically operated aluminum gloves, removed some object invisible to me from the back of the deck-chair. His eyes, behind the thick perspex of his helmet, had a withdrawn look.

Three sharp pips in my right ear warned me that Simon Warwick was speaking on the intercom. "Quick!" he said. "To your right. WHAT ARE THEY? *Over."*

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His voice was urgent, and turning in the direction he indicated I saw some two hundred dwarfish green creatures with hideously elongated glass heads advancing over the rim of a nearby crater.

"My God!" I cried hoarsely. "Roger out."

They were closer now, coming towards us at a curious loping run, and the utter silence of their approach combined with the tritium-bombs that gleamed dully at their waists in the thin Venusian sunlight lent them an oddly menacing air. "Calling Strong," I breathed into my mouthpiece, and I confess that it was all I could do to keep my voice steady. "Have you seen them? Over."

Never have I admired the man more. With barely a glance at the intruders he continued his patient sifting of meteoric dust through a borrowed hair-net. "Ask them what they want," was all he vouchsafed.

I took a pace forward and, putting on as bold a front as I could command, asked the Green Men by signs what we could do for them. Instantly they halted their ranks, and one who seemed by his dress and bearing to be their leader signed back as follows:

"Hear the word of Toom, Locum of Phut! We come in peace. Only render up unto us one amongst you, that the portion of Minrah, Ruler of the Skies, may be accomplished. Else, all must perish."

When I had passed the grim message on to Philip Strong he made no comment, save to inquire idly why the sign-language employed by these people was so quaintly archaic.

"I don't know," I told him, a little impatiently. "It is customary on many planets. The point is, what are we to do? Give them Hugh Trevose?"

"On no account," he said sharply, screwing a high-power magnifying-glass on to the front of his helmet. "I have yet to ask that young man what he was doing between the hours of eight and nine, mean stellar time, this morning. Let them have Semolina."

"Semolina!" I gasped.

"Certainly. She is clearly innocent. She had nothing whatever to do with the murder of this unfortunate knight."

"But, Philip," I cried, with a gesture of my enormous gauntlets. . . .

The point will by this time be clear. Singleness of purpose, a steady, ruthless determination on the part of the detective to keep to the matter in hand, must be the guiding star for all who set their hands to the difficult task of interplanetary crime fiction. Had Philip Strong allowed one of his principal suspects to be handed over. . . . But I have said too much already. One does not want to give the whole thing away before publication.

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A decade and more ago, McComas used to write science fiction under the pseudonym of Webb Marlowe; but since then his writing has been confined to editorial comments here and elsewhere, a noteworthy essay on capital punishment, and critiques of science-fantasy for the New York Times Book Review. *Now in 1954 he's blossoming out as a fiction-writer again, starting off with an intelligent analytical study of future penology in Raymond J. Healy's* 9 TALES OF SPACE AND TIME; *and I'm as happy as I'm sure you will be that F&SF has the privilege of being the first magazine to present a story by The New McComas. When science fiction turns to the past rather than the future, the theme of* beginnings — *of how things came to pass for the first time — is an especially fascinating one. We've brought you stories of the first man who consciously uttered a word (by John P. McKnight) and of the first man who learned to season food (by me); now McComas takes up another "first" which has been surprisingly neglected to date and introduces us to the delightful company of Sleepy Hawk, a tribal leader who knew how to fight and how to laugh and how to coin words . . . and how fighting could be replaced by something new and vital and demanding fresh word-making. — A. B.*

Brave New Word

by J. FRANCIS McCOMAS

THE TRAVELERS to the hot country arrived today, carrying many things, so tonight there will be dancing and all the hearts of The People will be good. As ever, when the travelers return, I remember how the thing began with Sleepy Hawk, that great doer of deeds, that laugher, that maker of words.

Most of The People think the matter had its beginning later; but I, whose oldest father had the story from the mouth of Sleepy Hawk himself, think otherwise. The true beginning was when Long Ax, that angry man, had his new ax handle break in his hand the very first time he swung the weapon. Long Ax had chosen the wood with care and knowledge, made it straight with his knife, and then, in the chosen way, fixed it to the great stone ax his oldest father had given him.

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Then, at the very first trial swing at one of the big trees that grew by the river where The People were camped, the handle had splintered, the great stone head had bounced from the tree to the river water and Long Ax, a splinter driven into his thumb, danced about, shouting with pain and anger.

Since all this was a very bad sign, the rest of the young men looked very solemn. All, that is, except Sleepy Hawk, who fell on his back and laughed. He laughed so loud and so long that the other four thought he might never stop, but choke himself to death there by the river.

"Why do you laugh?" cried Long Ax. "Now I must make another handle! We can't start until I do!"

"Yes," asked Hungry Dog, who was fat and liked to sit in Long Ax's shadow, "why do you laugh?"

Sleepy Hawk stopped choking himself and said, "I'm sorry. But you looked so — so —" he looked in his head for a word, could not find one and said, "so — laugh-making! One moment you were swinging your great ax, the next moment you were dancing about, a little boy with a splinter in your hand! And the fine new handle for your ax was nothing but wood for the fire!"

At Sleepy Hawk's words, even Mountain Bear, the quiet man, laughed softly deep in his throat.

The face of Long Ax colored the angry red and he said, "How would you like to stay here and laugh while the others follow *me* on our hunt?"

Sleepy Hawk sat up then and looked at the other. His face did look something like that of a hawk that sleeps, with his sharp curved nose and his half-closed eyes. But it was the face of a hawk just waiting to wake and pounce.

"How would you like to try to make me?" he said very softly.

Long Ax was still red with anger but he looked away from Sleepy Hawk, toward the river.

"You have a knife and I have nothing," he growled.

With a move so fast it could barely be seen Sleepy Hawk jumped to his feet, took the knife from his belt and tossed it away.

"Now, I have no knife."

"Enough!" cried Mountain Bear, who was a quiet man but strong like his name animal. "Save your blows for our enemies! Long Ax, I have a stick for a spear, dry and tough. You may have it for your ax. Sleepy Hawk, take up your knife. You know we would not go on a fight or a hunt without you to lead us."

So there was peace but later, while waiting for Long Ax to bind together haft and head of his weapon, Mountain Bear said to Sleepy Hawk, "I

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cannot understand you. Always you laugh. And there is nothing to smile about in life."

"Yes, there is! Each thing of life, even the worst thing, has a part of it that will make you laugh, if only you will see it."

"Ha! I suppose you laugh even when you are with a woman!"

"Sometimes. If it is the proper woman and her heart is like mine."

But, as I said, most of The People think the matter had its beginning later, there on the ledge in the mountain of the Mud Dwellers, halfway down the great cliff, when the five young men came face to face with six of the little Mud Dwellers and there was no going back for any man.

For, after much thought, the band had decided to go toward the sun and into the mountain of the Mud Dwellers, rather than to the cold mountains and the Dwellers-In-Caves. The young men of The People wanted women. Those Dwellers-In-Caves, who made such queer markings on the walls of their homes, were strong and not easy to surprise. Too, their women were fierce, not kind and pleasing like those of the Mud Dwellers.

So they made a long journey, over a strange country. First, the river had dried into a hot land. After that, they seemed to be in the time of the long sun, come before they had thought, and the skins of animals they wore were hot on their backs. Sleepy Hawk wound into a tight roll his skin of a big cat and wrapped it around his waist. After a while, the others did the same.

Sleepy Hawk looked at them, running slowly along, the water pouring off their bodies, and said, "It is cooler by the side of our river."

Even Long Ax grinned at this although his tongue was swollen in his mouth.

The heat of the long sun fell on them and what little water they found made their hearts sick and their minds weak. So the young men went a day and a night without drinking.

Then, when they felt they could run no longer, they saw before them that great mountain rising straight up from the ground to the sky which held in its heart the little caves of the little men that The People called the Mud Dwellers. They stopped and looked up at the mountain.

"Oo-ee!" cried Hungry Dog, "that will be a hard run!"

But Sleepy Hawk found a trickle of water and they drank it without having their bellies cry out against them.

So the five young men of The People climbed the mountain that day and found its top was broad and flat. They moved carefully across the ground, ducking from tree to tree. Once, they found a pile of rocks that

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had, in the long ago, been a Mud Dwellers' home, before the wars of The People had driven them down inside the mountain, where the little men thought they might live more safely.

"These do not look like rocks," said Mountain Bear, stopping to look at them.

"They are not rocks," said Sleepy Hawk. "I have heard that the Mud Dwellers mix dried grass with mud, shape this into blocks and let the heat of the sun make the blocks hard. They build their caves with these hard blocks."

"That is a foolish waste of time," said Mountain Bear.

"And we waste time," said Sleepy Hawk. "We must reach the edge of their home place before dark."

So, just before the hiding of the sun, the young hunters came to where the top of the mountain suddenly ended. They crouched down and looked over the edge. There was a great cut, going deep to the heart of the mountain; and down, far down at the bottom of the cut, they could see, moving like bugs on a raw hide, a few of the Mud Dwellers.

"We'll rest here until the first morning light," Sleepy Hawk told them.

"Then climb down as far as we can?" asked Mountain Bear.

Sleepy Hawk nodded.

"Then we should watch another day, I think," said Long Ax.

Sleepy Hawk nodded again.

"We'll have to be quick," said Short Spear.

"Take women only," grunted Long Ax. "Weapons too, if there are any."

"And food!" added Hungry Dog.

"No food!" cried all the others.

"They do not eat," Cat-In-The-Mud told Hungry Dog. "Their food is taken from the ground and it is dirty."

Sleepy Hawk smiled a little at this, but said nothing.

Yet it did not work out as they planned. The five young men waked at the first light and slowly, quietly, they climbed down the steep side of the cut in the mountain. But as they crawled around a high rock to a narrow ledge, six men of the Mud Dwellers came up onto the ledge from the down trail. All stopped suddenly and stared at each other.

Then each side took a step forward, raised their weapons, then stopped again, weapons half-lifted in their hands.

"Well," Long Ax growled deep in his throat, "why do we wait?"

"For the same reason they do!" Sleepy Hawk's voice was sharp.

He waved his hand and they all looked quickly about them. There was

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the long, narrow ledge, with the mountain going straight up from one side and, from the other, straight down in a heart-choking drop. And at each end of the ledge stood a little group of men, angry, uncertain, the length of three steps of a tall man between them.

"Who can win a fight in such a place?" asked Sleepy Hawk.

"We can!" growled Long Ax. "They are but little men!"

"But they are six and we are five, so all is equal."

"Throw spears and after them!" cried Long Ax.

Cat-In-The-Mud and Hungry Dog raised their weapons. As they did so, three of the Mud Dwellers lifted their arms.

"Stop!" cried Sleepy Hawk. Over his shoulder he said to Long Ax, "I am chief here. Now look, all of you. They throw, we throw. None can miss. If any men are left after the throwing, they fight. Perhaps one of all here lives. Then what? If that one is of The People, can he, wounded, alone, ever hope to return to our river? No!"

"You are right," said Mountain Bear.

"They will call for help," warned Cat-In-The-Mud.

"Soon enough to fight then," said Sleepy Hawk. "There is little room for more on this ground."

"True enough," said Mountain Bear.

"Now, quiet all of you," ordered Sleepy Hawk, "and let me think."

He watched the Mud Dwellers. They were strange little men. Around their waists they wore belts of dried skin, but in these belts were set little pieces of colored stone. They wore smaller belts around their heads, to keep their long hair from falling over their eyes, and these belts, too, had the pieces of stone in them.

Sleepy Hawk liked these colored stones very much. But he did not think he would get any from the Mud Dwellers, who, though small, stood their ground as bravely as did The People, frowning, with knives and spears ready for the fight.

"Look at their spears," Sleepy Hawk said.

"They have two handles!" There was wonder in Cat-In-The-Mud's voice.

"Yes. One goes back from the hand, then joins the other, which goes forward to the head of the spear."

"I don't understand," Mountain Bear said softly.

"Neither do I." Sleepy Hawk frowned. "Two handles . . . I would like a closer look at those strange spears."

"Enough of this women's chatter!" screamed Long Ax. "Let us fight like men!"

Sleepy Hawk shrugged.

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"If the rest of you feel that we should get ourselves killed," he said quietly, "and leave our bones here for Mud Dwellers to hang in their caves, why — let Long Ax begin the fight."

None moved.

Long Ax called out again but still no man of the other four moved and Long Ax closed his mouth tightly.

For a time there was silence on the ledge. Sleepy Hawk watched the Mud Dwellers; he had a wish to talk with them, to learn what they might be thinking. Now, like many of The People, Sleepy Hawk had a woman from the Mud Dwellers in his family, and from her had learned a few of their love words, the words that a mother says to a child that pleases her. But that was all. When The People caught a Mud Dweller woman it was her duty to learn their talk, not theirs to learn her noises.

So there was nothing he could say to them. He watched. They, too, stood as did The People, their leader a little in front of them, staring at his enemies, his men behind him, looking about nervously, their knives and strange two-handled spears ready for blood.

It seemed then to Sleepy Hawk that the two groups of men looked like two deer caught in the trap sands of a river. A deer so caught by the water hiding below the quiet-looking sands cannot step forward, nor can it move backward. So it was with the men. Their legs were caught on the rock. They dared not move either up or down. All of them, The People and Mud Dwellers, could only stand still and wait for what would happen.

And thinking of the men trapped like silly deer, Sleepy Hawk laughed aloud.

"Why do you laugh?" snarled Hungry Dog. Fright was in his voice.

Sleepy Hawk was choking again, as he always did when laughing swelled in his throat.

"This is — this is all very —" He choked and his breath flew out between his lips and he made a word.

"What was that?" cried Mountain Bear. "What did you say?"

"I said, *funny*."

"What does *funny* mean?"

"It is a word I have made and it means laugh-making. All this — we and they standing here, of us all none daring to go a step forward or back — it is very laugh-making . . . very *funny!*"

"We have a crazy man for a chief," growled Long Ax. "Or a fool. It takes little to make a fool laugh —"

But Sleepy Hawk was not listening. He was watching the leader of the Mud Dwellers and he was so startled by what that one was doing that he gave no ear to Long Ax's words. For the Mud Dweller was smiling. At first,

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it was a little smile, on the mouth only, but then, as Sleepy Hawk started to laugh again, the Mud Dweller's smile shone in his eyes, he opened his mouth and laughed as loudly as Sleepy Hawk ever did.

The two of them stood and laughed with each other while their followers looked at them uneasily and Long Ax muttered words of anger that he knew Sleepy Hawk could not hear.

Then, perhaps because his heart was warmed by his laughing, or because he was a great thinker as the later days of his life proved, Sleepy Hawk did a very strange thing. First he put his knife back in his belt, so that his left hand held nothing. Then he dropped his spear from his right hand. Mountain Bear cried out at this, but Sleepy Hawk did not listen. He stepped forward one step and raised his right hand, so that the chief of the Mud Dwellers could see that it was empty.

The Mud Dweller's smile was now on his lips only. He looked very hard at Sleepy Hawk, then he slowly nodded his head. Then he moved his hands slowly so that the two handles of his spear came apart. In one hand, he held a spear with a sharp stone head. In the other, just a simple, harmless stick with a hook at one end. He dropped these to the ground and stepped toward Sleepy Hawk, his right hand raised.

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The two of them came close together. Sleepy Hawk said a Mud Dweller word that they all knew, one that a mother uses when her child makes her smile at his play. The Mud Dweller's smile became smaller; the young men saw that he did not like the use of that word between men. So Sleepy Hawk pointed at the young men of The People, then at the Mud Dwellers, making fearful frowns to show each of them angry at the other. Then he pointed to himself and laughed. He pointed to the Mud Dweller and laughed. He swept his arm around the air, pointing at both sides and laughing.

Then, slowly and clearly, Sleepy Hawk said his new word.

The chief of the Mud Dwellers nodded and said it after him.

"*Fun — nee!*" he said.

Sleepy Hawk held out his empty right hand and the Mud Dweller slowly reached out and touched Sleepy Hawk's hand with his.

"Very funny," answered Sleepy Hawk, grinning. Then, hoping the Mud Dweller might know the tongue of The People, he said, "I am Sleepy Hawk."

But the Mud Dweller did not understand. He said some words, in the high bird voice of the Mud Dwellers. Nor did Sleepy Hawk understand the Mud Dweller's words, so the two men just stood there, their right hands touching, smiling.

"Do any of you know any of the Mud Dwellers' words among men?" asked Sleepy Hawk.

The young men shook their heads.

"Never mind. Put down your weapons."

"Is that wise?" asked Mountain Bear.

"It is. Put them down."

So all the young men except Long Ax lowered their spears and put their knives and axes in their belts.

"Long Ax! I command you —" Sleepy Hawk began, but the chief of the Mud Dwellers turned his head and said a few words to his followers and they, slowly, took apart their two-handled spears and set them on the ground and those that had knives in their hands put these back in their belts. So Long Ax, too, let his weapon rest on the ground.

While their men stood, not at peace, but not ready for war, the two chiefs made talk with their hands; and after a while Sleepy Hawk nodded many times and turned to his followers and said, "Now we may go. With no spears in our backs. I have his promise."

"What is that worth!" cried Long Axe. "I do not turn my back on an enemy."

"Stay here, then," answered Sleepy Hawk. He himself waved at the Mud Dweller, turned and took a step back toward the upward trail.

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Then he stopped, so suddenly that Mountain Bear, who was behind him, bumped into Sleepy Hawk.

"What is the matter with you?" cried Mountain Bear.

"Let us stay a little longer. I want one of those spears."

Sleepy Hawk looked again at the Mud Dweller, smiled, and very slowly, took the knife from his belt. The Mud Dweller frowned, but made no move when he saw that Sleepy Hawk held the knife by its blade and offered it to him.

"One does not give presents to an enemy," said Hungry Dog.

"This is no present. Watch and see."

The Mud Dweller took Sleepy Hawk's knife and looked at it. It was a good knife, with a blade of sharp flint and a handle made of the polished horn of old humpback. It was easy to see that the Mud Dweller wanted the knife.

Then Sleepy Hawk pointed to the little head-belt with its polished stones. Then he pointed to himself, then to the knife, and finally, to the Mud Dweller.

The Mud Dweller reached behind his head and took off the belt. Its bright-colored stones sparkled in the sun's light. The Mud Dweller handed it to Sleepy Hawk, who fastened it around his head. The Mud Dweller weighted the knife in his hand, nodded twice, and put the knife in the belt around his waist.

"Ha!" said Mountain Bear. "I thought you wanted a spear."

"Be quiet! I shall get one."

"How?"

"You shall see."

Once more Sleepy Hawk made as if to go. And once more he stopped and turned back to the Mud Dweller. That little man watched with sharp eyes. Sleepy Hawk took his rolled-up skin of a mountain cat from around his waist, shook it out so that the Mud Dweller could see, and spread it on the ground.

The Mud Dweller felt of the skin and his fingers saw how soft it was, having been well-cured by Sleepy Hawk's oldest mother. Sleepy Hawk looked up at the sun, covered his eyes, and shivered. The Mud Dweller watched closely. Sleepy Hawk uncovered his eyes but still shivered. Then he reached for the skin and wrapped it around him. As soon as it covered him all over, he stopped shaking and smiled.

The chief of the Mud Dwellers nodded to show he understood that when the time of little sun came, the skin would keep him warm and dry.

He reached toward Sleepy Hawk for the skin of the big cat.

"Careful!" Mountain Bear called softly.

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Sleepy Hawk let the skin fall to the ground. The Mud Dweller reached for it again, but Sleepy Hawk raised his hand, shook his head just a little, and walked over to where the two parts of the chief's spear lay on the ground. A Mud Dweller started for Sleepy Hawk, but his chief called out and the man was quiet. Sleepy Hawk picked up the two parts of the weapon but did not take them away. Instead he carried them back to the chief of the Mud Dwellers.

Sleepy Hawk made slow, careful signs. He lifted in his hand the spear that was no spear, but just a harmless stick. He shook it, held each end of it in turn, very close to his eyes, then, shaking his head, he let that stick fall to the ground. Next, Sleepy Hawk looked at the spear that was a proper spear, felt its sharp point with his thumb and nodded. After that, he picked up the other stick and held both parts out toward the Mud Dweller.

The Mud Dweller shook his head.

Sleepy Hawk stirred the cat's skin with his toe.

The Mud Dweller frowned just a little, then nodded. He moved his hand to show that Sleepy Hawk could have the two spears and reached down for the skin. But Sleepy Hawk shook his head and held out the stick part that was not a spear at all.

The Mud Dweller smiled, took both parts from Sleepy Hawk's hands. He looked around him, then moved to the rim of the ledge and stood there, looking upward.

"Now we shall see how a man throws that spear," Sleepy Hawk said softly.

"Surely he will not throw it *up* the mountain," said Mountain Bear.

But that is what the little man did. The Mud Dweller put the pieces together and raised his arm back to throw. One of the shafts went back from his hand. The queer hook at its end held the haft of the true spear. Then the Mud Dweller threw and, as the stick in his hand made his arm twice as long as any man's, so was his throw twice as strong and the spear flew up the mountain, farther than the farthest spear ever thrown by any of The People. It landed beside the trail down which the young men had come and stood there, its point deep in the ground.

"Oo — ee!" whistled Mountain Bear.

"A stick that throws!" cried Sleepy Hawk.

"The stick throws the spear!" said Cat-In-The-Mud. He grinned sourly at Long Ax. "Their weapons are better than ours. Sleepy Hawk is a very wise chief."

And Hungry Dog nodded and moved away from Long Ax.

Then the chief of the Mud Dwellers took up Sleepy Hawk's spear and showed him how to fit it on the throwing stick. He seemed to think of

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something new, then, for he pointed to his own spear sticking in the ground high up the mountain. He made a sign to keep Sleepy Hawk's spear, then pointed at Sleepy Hawk and to the spear up by the trail.

"A wise man," Sleepy Hawk said to Mountain Bear. "He wants to keep my spear and I will take his as we pass by it."

"Wait!" cried Mountain Bear. "I want one of those spear-throwers!"

And he unwrapped his bear's skin from where it was wound around his middle and walked over to one of the Mud Dwellers. After him came the rest of the young men of The People, even the angry Long Ax, and The People and the Mud Dwellers stood beside each other, smiling and talking, even though there was no understanding of what was said.

And all of them laughed when a little, fat Mud Dweller offered Hungry Dog some small, round brown things and made signs that Hungry Dog should eat them. Which Hungry Dog did, of course.

"Good!" he cried with his mouth full, as a man should not. "Eat them! They're good!"

"Now, Hungry Dog," said Sleepy Hawk, "give them some dried meat."

Hungry Dog looked unhappy at this but he took some dried flesh of deer and offered it to the Mud Dwellers. After chewing a little bit, they smiled and rubbed their middles to show that the dried meat was good to their insides.

Now the sun was straight up in the sky. The giving and receiving was finished and the men stood about, tired, hot, but peaceful. Sleepy Hawk made signs to the Mud Dweller chief, pointing up the mountain. That man nodded, but he looked sad. Then Sleepy Hawk looked up at the sun, waved his hand across the sky, pointed down at the ledge, held up his fingers many times. The Mud Dweller smiled.

Sleepy Hawk thought a long time, looking hard at the Mud Dweller, then he said a word. Mountain Bear, who was standing by, had never heard this word before.

Sleepy Hawk pointed to the Mud Dwellers and the young men of The People, at the skins and the weapons, and at the belts with the colored stones.

He said the word again.

The Mud Dweller said the word after Sleepy Hawk.

Sleepy Hawk and the Mud Dweller said the word together.

Then the young men of The People waved to the Mud Dwellers and started the climb back to the top of the mountain.

When they reached the flat top of the mountain and rested a while, Sleepy Hawk laughed softly and said to Mountain Bear, "You know, I have

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another, better knife at home. And my cat's skin was old. I shall hunt for another one." He laughed again. "But I have never had a stick that throws spears farther than can a man's arms. And when I seek a wife, I shall give her father some of the colored stones. Even the chief of all our chiefs should then be willing to give me his oldest daughter — the beautiful one."

Mountain Bear hefted the throwing stick. "We are coming back?"

"Yes. I want more throwing sticks. I want many belts with their stones of many colors. Yes, in three hands of suns I will return to. . . ."

"To what?" asked Mountain Bear. "I heard you make a word."

"Yes. I made a word to tell of giving one thing to get another. I taught it to that chief of the Mud Dwellers. So, from now on, unless some fool like Long Ax makes trouble, the Mud Dweller and I will not fight. We will *trade*."

And that is why we go peacefully to the land of Mud Dwellers and bring back many things without war. And that is why the youngest young son of Sleepy Hawk, who is like the old man was, is planning to go up the mountains where the Dwellers-in-Caves are. He thinks they will trade us the strange colors they put on the walls of their caves and other things for our throwing sticks and skins and bright stones.

ANNOUNCEMENT: *The introduction to* Brave New Word *didn't, I'll confess, tell the whole story. The sad fact is that J. Francis McComas is having such a fine time being a writer (in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato) that he has retired from the coeditorship of F&SF. He'll still remain on the staff as Advisory Editor, available for consultation on tricky points; but from now on I'm the solo target for your brickbats (and maybe occasional bouquets). McComas fans will continue to find his science fiction reviews in the N. Y.* Times *and, I hope, most of his new short fiction here in F&SF.*

Readers have often wondered how McComas and I worked together and who did what, and we were forced to say we just didn't know. It was a perfectly fused editorial symbiosis, in which it was impossible to say, "This is obviously McComas' doing," or, "There's a touch of Boucher." As a result, the character of F&SF has been so firmly fixed as a joint McComas-Boucher product that I don't think you'll notice any significant difference in the future. Certainly no changes in basic policy are even remotely contemplated; and I hope you'll find my solo efforts as satisfactory as those of the symbiotic team. And if not, please let me know at once!

ANTHONY BOUCHER

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In which an astute young Englishman shows us that glory, even in space, is a coin with two sides.

First Man In The Moon

by PETER PHILLIPS

The First Man In The Moon was spending his one-hundred-and-tenth birthday in bed.

He crumpled a white bedsheet into shadowed mooncraters, and waited for the invasion.

He wondered if there would be anything special for lunch.

Outside his bedroom, five reporters and a photographer, chosen by ballot, received a final crisp briefing from his youngest great-granddaughter.

"Don't fire questions at him," she ordered. "Take it one at a time. He'll talk if he wants to, not otherwise. He" — she lowered her voice — "probably hasn't long to go. But since he belongs to the world . . ."

"We're privileged," muttered a reporter, suddenly uncomfortable.

"Like a wake," breathed the youngest reporter to himself.

She ushered them into the antiseptic temple, closed the door quietly behind them.

They grouped themselves on chairs about the bed. The First Man In The Moon looked up from his mooncraters, looked at them from a million miles away.

But his voice was loud in the room.

"I heard," he said. "I may be half bloody blind, but my ears are good. Of course I'm going. I've been going for the last twenty years."

He made new craters.

"How do you feel, Mr. Cline?"

"Old and tired and hungry. She's right, of course. Not all the doctors on earth can keep me going much longer. I'm hungry for my lunch and I'm hungry for death, and that's an appetite that won't be thwarted. But before I go there's something I must tell the world."

He swept a thin arm across the sheet, viciously wiping out the mooncraters.

"I was not," he said, "the first man to step onto the moon . . ."

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The youngest reporter, to whom this was a refutation of Holy Writ — by the Writer, dropped his obtrusive pencil.

"But —"

"But —"

"But —"

Watery eyes came back from far space and glinted with earthly pleasure. Old gums made sponge-munching noises.

"Shakes you, eh? Eff-em-eye-tee-em — fummytum — First Man In The Moon — the initials were so handy for headlines, weren't they? Not to you and your television papers and what-not — to your great-grandfathers. But journalists and publicity men don't change, any more than their customers.

"The First. The Greatest First in world history. First man to set foot on extraterrestrial matter. First footstep to the stars. Lectures. Films. Books. Honours. Degrees. No escape. No time for work, for thought, consolidation of self.

"Congo basin, after doctors said no more rocketeering. First native I meet, kneels, globe of ivory, *ognu abala n'ngini* — God Whose Face Is The Moon.

"Village in Yorkshire, England — 'Yon's owd Cline, first feller to reach t'moon. Foony owd sod. Reckons nowt to it.'

"No escape anyway, anywhere. Thanks to you. Or your great-grandfathers. First, first, first . . . First my fanny!"

The photographer dropped a flashbulb. The lush carpet bounced it.

"Even when we'd turned arse-over-tip, made the braking bursts and realised we were going to do it," said the old man, "neither of us thought 'Who's first out?'

"It had been George's dream far longer than it had been mine. I was just the man who backed his dream with money. I took it for granted he'd go first. He took it for granted that I'd call the tune.

"It wasn't until we had our spacesuits on and were standing in front of the airlock that the question really came up. 'After you, George,' I said. 'After you, Matthew,' he said. 'Your ideas,' I said. 'Your money,' he said.

"Money gave me the idea. I took my arm out of the spacesuit arm, reached into my pants pocket, fingered a coin, pushed it out of a duct onto my left-hand gauntlet. 'We'll toss,' I said. 'Heads, you first. Tails, me first.'

"He agreed. I tossed the coin off the palm of the gauntlet. It struck the deck at an angle, spun round, turned up heads. 'After you, George,' I said, and he went. I tried to pick the coin up, but space gauntlets weren't made for that.

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"So I followed him down the ladder. We stood there for a while drinking it in, then went back into the ship for the world broadcast.

"Two friends, a farsighted scientist and a farsighted financier, were due to proclaim that man had broken his earthly bonds — et cetera. We took off our spacesuits.

"George made the two-way connection, got the world on the line, told a few billion people that they were about to hear the voice of the man who had first set foot on the moon — and shoved the mike into my hands.

"The most glorious moment in man's history . . . What could I do? Call him a liar? Make silly deprecatory remarks? Talk about shared glory? Say we'd both jumped feet first from a narrow forty-foot-high airlock and landed together?

"No.

"I said briefly what the First Man In The Moon would be expected to say, and cut off.

"Then George said, 'You forgot to pick this up,' and gave me back the double-headed penny I'd tossed with.

"Farsighted? Yes, we were both farsighted. But George was smarter."

The dying old man rumpled his sheets again.

"Rot the bastard's soul in hell. . . ." he said.

Last Chance!

If you haven't already made your reservation for the Twelfth World Science Fiction Convention, to be held in San Francisco on the weekend of September 3–6, you'd better do so at once. Reasons: The guest of honor will be John W. Campbell, Jr., most deserving of all the twelve recipients of that distinction; many of F&SF's most popular authors, including Poul Anderson, R. Bretnor, Miriam Allen deFord and Idris Seabright, are resident in the San Francisco Bay Area, and many others will attend from all over the country; the program features will include an exhibit of Chesley Bonestell paintings, previews of the latest s.f. films, a symposium with Mystery Writers of America on science and crime in fiction, and countless other special events — plus, probably, the world premiere of a Bradbury-inspired opera with a distinguished professional cast. The most important reason of all, however, is simply that Conventions Are Fun; so send your reservation, with $1, at once to Twelfth World Science Fiction Convention, Box 335, Station A, Richmond 2, Calif.

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Just to prove — as if you had any doubts — that nothing is sacred to Mack Reynolds, here is the theme of L. Ron Hubbard's second most terrifying novel blithely turned into farce by a deft twist of the Reynolds wrist.

Prone

by MACK REYNOLDS

SUPCOM BULL UNDERWOOD said in a voice ominously mild, "I continually get the impression that every other sentence is being left out of this conversation. Now, tell me, General, what do you mean *things happen around him?*"

"Well, for instance, the first day Mitchie got to the Academy a cannon burst at a demonstration."

"What's a cannon?"

"A pre-guided-missile weapon," the commander of the Terra Military Academy told him. "You know, shells propelled by gunpowder. We usually demonstrate them in our history classes. This time four students were injured. The next day sixteen were hurt in ground war maneuvers."

There was an element of respect in the SupCom's tone. "Your course must be rugged."

General Bentley wiped his forehead with a snowy handkerchief even as he shook it negatively. "It was the first time any such thing happened. I tell you, sir, since Mitchie Farthingworth has been at the academy things have been chaotic. Fires in the dormitories, small arms exploding, cadets being hospitalized right and left. We've just got to expel that boy!"

"Don't be ridiculous," the SupCom growled. "He's the apple of his old man's eye. We've got to make a hero out of him if it means the loss of a battle fleet. But I still don't get this. You mean the Farthingworth kid is committing sabotage?"

"It's not that. We investigated. He doesn't do it on purpose, things just *happen* around him. Mitchie can't help it."

"Confound it, stop calling him Mitchie!" Bull Underwood snapped. "How do you know it's him if he doesn't do it? Maybe you're just having a run of bad luck."

"That's what I thought," Bentley said, "until I ran into Admiral

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Lawrence of the Space Marines Academy. He had the same story. The day Mitchie — excuse me, sir — Michael Farthingworth set foot in Nueve San Diego, things started happening. When they finally got him transferred to our academy the trouble stopped."

It was at times like these that Bull Underwood regretted his shaven head. He could have used some hair to tear. "Then it *must* be sabotage if it stops when he leaves!"

"I don't think so, sir."

The SupCom took a deep breath, snapped to his secretarobot, "Brief me on Cadet Michael Farthingworth, including his early life." While he waited he growled under his breath, "A stalemated hundred-year war on my hands with those Martian *makrons* and I have to get things like this tossed at me."

In less than a minute the secretarobot began: "Son of Senator Warren Farthingworth, Chairman War Appropriations Committee. Twenty-two years of age. Five foot six, one hundred and thirty, blue eyes, brown hair, fair. Born and spent early youth in former United States area. Early education by mother. At age of eighteen entered Harvard but schooling was interrupted when roof of assembly hall collapsed killing most of faculty. Next year entered Yale, leaving two months later when 90 per cent of the university's buildings were burnt down in the holocaust of '85. Next attended University of California but failed to graduate owing to the earthquake which completely . . ."

"That's enough," the SupCom rapped. He turned and stared at General Bentley. "What the hell is it? Even if the kid was a psychokinetic saboteur he couldn't accomplish all that."

The academy commander shook his head. "All I know is that since his arrival at the Terra Military Academy there's been an endless series of casualties. And the longer he's there the worse it gets. It's twice as bad now as when he first arrived." He got to his feet wearily. "I'm a broken man, sir, and I'm leaving this in your hands. You'll have my resignation this afternoon. Frankly, I'm afraid to return to the school. If I do, some day I'll probably crack my spine bending over to tie my shoelaces. It just isn't safe to be near that boy."

For a long time after General Bentley had left, SupCom Bull Underwood sat at his desk, his heavy underlip in a pout. "And just when the next five years' appropriation is up before the committee," he snarled at nobody.

He turned to the secretarobot. "Put the best psychotechnicians available on Michael Farthingworth. They are to discover . . . well, they are to discover why in hell things happen around him. Priority one."

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Approximately a week later the secretarobot said, "May I interrupt you, sir? A priority one report is coming in."

Bull Underwood grunted and turned away from the star chart he'd been studying with the two Space Marine generals. He dismissed them and sat down at his desk.

The visor lit up and he was confronted with the face of an elderly civilian. "Doctor Duclos," the civilian said. "Case of Cadet Michael Farthingworth."

"Good," the SupCom rumbled. "Doctor, what in the devil is wrong with young Farthingworth?"

"The boy is an accident prone."

Bull Underwood scowled at him. "A what?"

"An accident prone." The doctor elaborated with evident satisfaction. "There is indication that he is the most extreme case in medical history. Really a fascinating study. Never in my experience have I been —"

"Please, Doctor. I'm a layman. What is an accident prone?"

"Ah, yes. Briefly, an unexplained phenomenon first noted by the insurance companies of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. An accident prone has an unnaturally large number of accidents happen either to him, or, less often, to persons in his vicinity. In Farthingworth's case, they happen to persons about him. He himself is never affected."

The SupCom was unbelieving. "You mean to tell me there are some persons who just naturally have accidents happen to them without any reason?"

"That is correct," Duclos nodded. "Most prones are understandable. Subconsciously, the death wish is at work and the prone *seeks* self-destruction. However, science has yet to discover the forces behind the less common type such as Farthingworth exemplifies." The doctor's emphatic shrug betrayed his Gallic background. "It has been suggested that it is no more than the laws of chance at work. To counterbalance the accident prone, there should be persons at the other extreme who are blessed with abnormally good fortune. However . . ."

SupCom Bull Underwood's lower lip was out, almost truculently. "Listen," he interrupted. "What can be done about it?"

"Nothing," the doctor said, his shoulders raising and lowering again. "An accident prone seems to remain one as a rule. Not always, but as a rule. Fortunately, they are rare."

"Not rare enough," the SupCom growled. "These insurance companies, what did they do when they located an accident prone?"

"They kept track of him and refused to insure the prone, his business, home, employees, employers, or anyone or anything connected with him."

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Bull Underwood stared unblinkingly at the doctor, as though wondering whether the other's whole explanation was an attempt to pull his leg. Finally he rapped, "Thank you, Doctor Duclos. That will be all." The civilian's face faded from the visor.

The SupCom said slowly to the secretarobot, "Have Cadet Farthingworth report to me." He added sotto voce, "And while he's here have all personnel keep their fingers crossed."

The photoelectric-controlled door leading to the sanctum sanctorum of SupCom Bull Underwood glided quietly open and a lieutenant entered and came to a snappy attention. The door swung gently shut behind him.

"Well?" Bull Underwood growled.

"Sir, a Cadet Michael Farthingworth to report to you."

"Send him in. Ah, just a minute, Lieutenant Brown. How do you feel after talking to him?"

"Me, sir? I feel fine, sir." The lieutenant looked blankly at him.

"Hmmm. Well, send him in, confound it."

The lieutenant turned and the door opened automatically before him. "Cadet Farthingworth," he announced.

The newcomer entered and stood stiffly before the desk of Earth's military head. Bull Underwood appraised him with care. In spite of the swank Academy uniform, Michael Farthingworth cut a wistfully ineffectual figure. His faded blue eyes blinked sadly behind heavy contact lenses.

"That'll be all, Lieutenant," the SupCom said to his aide.

"Yes, sir." The lieutenant about-faced snappily and marched to the door — which swung sharply forward and quickly back again before the lieutenant was half way through.

SupCom Bull Underwood winced at the crush of bone and cartilage. He shuddered, then snapped to his secretarobot, "Have Lieutenant Brown hospitalized . . . and, ah . . . see he gets a Luna Medal for exposing himself to danger beyond the call of duty."

He swung to the newcomer and came directly to the point. "Cadet Farthingworth," he rapped, "do you know what an accident prone is?"

Mitchie's voice was low and plaintive. "Yes, sir."

"You do?" Bull Underwood was surprised.

"Yes, sir. At first such things as the school's burning down didn't particularly impress me as being personally connected with me, but the older I get, the worse it gets, and after what happened to my first date, I started to investigate."

The SupCom said cautiously, "What happened to the date?"

Mitchie flushed. "I took her to a dance and she broke her leg."

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The SupCom cleared his throat. "So finally you investigated?"

"Yes, sir," Mitchie Farthingworth said woefully. "And I found I was an accident prone and getting worse geometrically. Each year I'm twice as bad as the year before. I'm glad you've discovered it too, sir. I . . . I didn't know what to do. Now it's in your hands."

The SupCom was somewhat relieved. Possibly this wasn't going to be as difficult as he had feared. He said, "Have you any ideas Mitchie, ah, that is . . ."

"Call me Mitchie if you want, sir. Everybody else does."

"Have you any ideas? After all, you've done as much damage to Terra as a Martian task force would accomplish."

"Yes, sir. I think I ought to be shot."

"Huh?"

"Yes, sir. I'm expendable," Mitchie said miserably. "In fact, I suppose I'm probably the most expendable soldier that's ever been. All my life I've wanted to be a spaceman and do my share toward licking the Martians." His eyes gleamed behind his lenses. "Why, I've . . ."

He stopped and looked at his commanding officer pathetically. "What's the use? I'm just a bust. An accident prone. The only thing to do is liquidate me." He tried to laugh in self-deprecation but his voice broke.

Behind him, Bull Underwood heard the glass in his office window shatter without seeming cause. He winced again, but didn't turn.

"Sorry, sir," Mitchie said. "See? The only thing is to shoot me."

"Look," Bull Underwood said urgently, "stand back a few yards farther, will you? There on the other side of the room." He cleared his throat. "Your suggestion has already been considered, as a matter of fact. However, due to your father's political prominence, shooting you had to be ruled out."

From a clear sky the secretarobot began to say, " 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe."

SupCom Bull Underwood closed his eyes in pain and shrunk back into his chair. "What?" he said cautiously.

"The borogoves were mimsy as all hell," the secretarobot said decisively and shut up.

Mitchie looked at it. "Slipped its cogs, sir," he said helpfully. "It's happened before around me."

"The best damned memory bank in the system," Underwood protested. "Oh, no."

"Yes, sir," Mitchie said apologetically. "And I wouldn't recommend trying to repair it, sir. Three technicians were electrocuted when I was . . ."

The secretarobot sang, "O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"

"Completely around the corner," Mitchie said.

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"This," said Bull Underwood, "is too frabjous much! Senator or no Senator, appropriations or no appropriations, with my own bare hands—"

As he strode impulsively forward, he felt the rug giving way beneath him. He grasped desperately for the edge of the desk, felt ink bottle and water carafe go crashing over.

Mitchie darted forward to his assistance.

"Stand back!" Bull Underwood roared, holding an ankle with one hand, shaking the other hand in the form of a fist. "Get out of here, confound it!" Ink began to drip from the desk over his shaven head. It cooled him not at all. "It's not even safe to destroy you! It'd wipe out a regiment to try to assemble a firing squad! It—" Suddenly he paused, and when he spoke again his voice was like the coo of a condor.

"Cadet Farthingworth," he announced, "after considerable deliberation on my part I have chosen you to perform the most hazardous operation that Terra's forces have undertaken in the past hundred years. If successful, this effort will undoubtedly end the war."

"Who me?" Mitchie said.

"Exactly," SupCom Underwood snapped. "This war has been going on for a century without either side being able to secure that slight edge, that minute advantage which would mean victory. Cadet Farthingworth, you have been chosen to make the supreme effort which will give Terra

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that superiority over the Martians." The SupCom looked sternly at Mitchie.

"Yes, sir," he clipped. "What are my orders?"

The SupCom beamed at him. "Spoken like a true hero of Terra's Space Forces. On the spaceport behind this building is a small spycraft. You are to repair immediately to it and blast off for Mars. Once there you are to land, hide the ship, and make your way to their capital city."

"Yes, sir! And what do I do then?"

"Nothing," Bull Underwood said with satisfaction. "You do absolutely nothing but live there. I estimate that your presence in the enemy capital will end the war in less than two years."

Michael Farthingworth snapped him a brilliant salute. "Yes, sir."

Spontaneous combustion broke out in the wastebasket.

Through the shards of his window, SupCom Bull Underwood could hear the blast-off of the spyship. Half a dozen miles away the flare of a fuel dump going up in flames lighted up the sky.

Seated there in the wreckage of his office he rubbed his ankle tenderly. "The only trouble is when the war is over we'll have to bring him home."

But then he brightened. "Perhaps we could leave him there as our occupation forces. It would keep them from ever recovering to the point where they could try again."

He tried to get to his feet, saying to the secretarobot, "Have them send me in a couple of medical corpsmen."

"Beware the Jabberwock," the secretarobot sneered.

Coming Next Month

Our next issue (on the stands in early August) will bring you two striking novelets of the future:

Lot's Daughter, *in which Ward Moore continues the probing analysis of character in post-atomic chaos begun in his well-remembered* Lot; *and*

Music of the Sphere, *in which William Morrison presents the plight of a spaceman who exchanges the lonely monotony of his station for the conflicts of a world gone mad.*

There'll also be a powerful study of the irony of planetary conquest by Alfred Coppel, light-hearted specimens of imaginative fun by Evelyn E. Smith and John Novotny, and other stories by such favorites of yours as Lord Dunsany, Mildred Clingerman, Robert Sheckley and others.

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITOR

There seems to be some evidence that the boom of science-fiction-in-book-form, which began about five years ago, is starting to wane — though a book-reviewer would never guess it from the quantity of books which come to his desk. The number of titles published is still high; but bookstores and rental libraries — and especially the all-important newsstands — report a falling-off in that first flushed frenzy of enthusiasm as readers discovered a new field of entertainment.

At the same time I know of a number of recent converts, particularly among professional men outside of the physical sciences; and I'd venture the guess that the potential market is still there . . . but that readers are getting pretty tired of the attitude of too many publishers that anything can get by if you label it "science fiction."

As an illustration in point, there have been seven books published as "science fiction novels" during the month under consideration here. Of those seven, exactly one seems to me worthy, both as science and as fiction, to bear the label, while the others range from good fiction with bad science down to books intolerable in either respect.

That one wholly satisfactory novel is Poul Anderson's BRAIN WAVE (Ballantine, $2.50 and 35¢) — and it is good enough to stand beside earlier entries by Asimov, Clement and Pangborn as a serious candidate for Novel of the Year. The premise, fantastic enough but plausibly presented, is the removal of an inhibitory field which has restricted neuronic response on this earth, so that I.Q.'s zoom suddenly to a norm of around 500, while morons reach an easy 150 and the brighter animals begin to attain the lower levels of former humanity. Anderson has worked out in wonderfully logical detail the consequences of this assumption, never falling into the trap of thinking that I.Q. alone is the answer to everything; and he has — as F&SF readers would inevitably expect of him — advanced his speculations with exciting storytelling and moving characterization. This is Mr. Anderson's debut in the adult novel (you'll recall his fine juvenile, VAULT OF THE AGES), and as welcome a debut as I've witnessed in several years.

As to the other six novels: David Duncan's DARK DOMINION (Ballantine, $2.50 and 35¢) is as well written and forcefully told as one would expect

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from an experienced and capable writer who has published a little of everything, from firstrate suspense stories to an unusually good labor novel, and it has a good theme in the study of human interactions in the tightly restricted project preparing to launch the first space satellite. Unfortunately these virtues tend to get lost in a weak and implausible spy plot and the discovery of a miraculous new element which strains my credulity more severely than any of the MSS in this month's slush-pile. Jerry Sohl's THE ALTERED EGO (Rinehart, $2.50) is a sort of mystery melodrama dealing with subversive efforts to tamper with our country's program to "restore" key men after death by inserting personality-recordings into their revivified bodies. It's almost rational . . . as Sohl novels go. John Taine's G.O.G.666 (Fantasy Press, $3) is yet another spy story (I, for one, am getting very tired of an endless future of sinister Russians) and a slow and muddled one; what plot there is deals with a fifty-year plan in genetics to create a new labor force. Neither story nor science can stand comparison with Taine's best work in the incunabular days of American s.f.

COSMIC MANHUNT (Ace, 35¢) is the new title of L. Sprague de Camp's *Astounding* serial of 1949, THE QUEEN OF ZAMBA; one of the first in the *Viagens* series, it's a fairly primitive and predictable adventure story which is "science fiction" because it is said to happen on the remote planet Krishna. The Ace double-volume is worth buying, however, for its other half, a reprint of Clifford D. Simak's disturbing and effective 1953 novel, RING AROUND THE SUN. Easily the worst of the month's (or year's) novels is Willy Johns's THE FABULOUS JOURNEY OF HIERONYMUS MEEKER (Little, Brown, $3.50), a painful combination of crude and wordy "satire" with outrageously unlettered "science."

The seventh book published as "a novel" is really a collection of short stories, typographically disguised but not rewritten into unity: E. Mayne Hull's PLANETS FOR SALE (Fell, $2.75), which includes five of the six "Artur Blord" stories which ran in *Astounding* 1943–1946, plus one new one. These spectacular tales of free enterprise run wild in the Ridge Stars are, in their preposterous way, rather fun taken singly, if somewhat tedious as a solid group.

Curiously, the latest anthologies reach a much higher average level than the novels; and this department's anti-anthology bias will remain in abeyance indefinitely if anthologists can continue to produce books like these.

In PORTALS OF TOMORROW (Rinehart, $3.75), August Derleth inaugurates an annual series intended "to do for the fantastic story what has been done so admirably by Martha Foley and her predecessor, the late Edward J. O'Brien, for the short story in general." I can only say that, to my taste, he succeeds absolutely, from his intelligent introduction through his choice of

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sixteen unanthologized stories of 1953 on to his complete checklist of the year's "fantastic stories." (Derleth wisely refuses to draw a sharp line between science fiction and the broader field of imaginative literature; but even inveterate line-drawers will accept most of the stories here as s.f.) F&SF readers will remember many of the selections, especially two entries by Mildred Clingerman and one by John Anthony, and greet with pleasure a number of fine stories from other magazines, particularly those by Clifford D. Simak (*Galaxy*) and Robert Sheckley (*Astounding*). In all, it's as literate, original and entertaining an anthology as has turned up in a long time.

And of much the same quality is Groff Conklin's SCIENCE-FICTION THINKING MACHINES (Vanguard, $3.50). These Vanguard "patterned" anthologies have consistently revealed Conklin at his best; and he's rarely done a better job of creative editing than in this large collection of twenty unhackneyed tales of robots, androids and computers. That so many good stories of mechanically created life should have remained unanthologized is amazing; you'll be unceasingly rewarded here, from Karel Čapek's classic play R. U. R. (here reprinted in full), which gave us the very word *robot*, to a wondrous Poul Anderson novelet of cybernetics and balladry which is only a few months old. And Mr. Conklin's editorial comments on the history of robotics — both in s.f. and in life — are as stimulating as the best of the stories.

That intangible of "stimulation" seems to be the only factor lacking in the latest Bleiler-Dikty annual, YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS: 1954 (Fell, $3.50). These five long novelets, ranging from 17,000 words to 30,000, are a markedly able and readable lot — but apt to leave you with the feeling that you must have read them somewhere before. The exception is Kendell Foster Crossen's *Assignment to Aldebaran*, a nobly screwball detective-farce of a criminous civilization in which honesty is socially reprehensible. And the other four (by Leinster, Dick, Gold-Krepps and Robinson) at least provide an evening of smoothly professional reading.

There's unusual value for the money in a reprint anthology, the SELECTIONS (Pennant, 25¢) from Judith Merril's 1952 BEYOND HUMAN KEN. It's startlingly long for a 25¢ book, containing more than two-thirds of the lengthy original; and the quality of choices and comments is everything one expects of Miss Merril — who regularly impresses me as a practically flawless anthologist.

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Somehow the tradition has developed that our Ancient Enemy appears among us late in the evening, dawdling about the more decadent supper clubs (those with the quiet little rooms upstairs and the discreet headwaiters), or leaning abstractedly over the more populous gaming tables . . . clad always in the most proper, if a trifle outmoded, evening dress. That's a false tradition, of course; Master Nicholas is here, there, everywhere, everywhen. So, meet him now, resplendent in a sports coat of reddish Harris tweed, contrasting slacks and dacron sports shirt; comfortably enjoying — though the day is hot and sticky — those midget auto races held every summer in your town

Crack-Up

by JOHN JAKES

SOME OF THEM had been waiting since 10 o'clock in the morning. By two in the afternoon, their automobiles covered all of the parking lot surrounding the track, where a hot wind lifted dust.

The people waited in a swollen, shifting mass outside the gates, sweating in the brassy heat of the sun. Their faces were red, sticky with sweat, their bodies moved together pulpishly, rhythmically, as they shifted. Their eyes rolled in expectancy.

At two, the gates opened. Like an angry, snuffling herd of animals, they poured inside, leaping up over the rows of seats. By ten minutes to 3, every seat was taken.

The people sat in the sun, blinking, eating popcorn, drinking beer, outwardly trying to conceal their eagerness. Voices made a muted hum, and from down in the pits came the growling roar of engines warming up for the qualification heats.

The crowd talked of many things, watching the track with eager eyes.

"It'll be pretty good today," they said.

"Plenty of hot drivers," they said. "Everybody wants to see Robinson drive."

"Robinson's the best," they said. "He'll win."

Down below, the cars growled their sounds in the pits, and the brick track waited, scorching in the sun.

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"Maybe somebody will crack up," they said. "Maybe somebody will die . . ."

Duke Robinson crinkled the paper cup and threw it away. He leaned against the water cooler in the restful dimness under the stands. Above, the people shifted and talked in the period between qualifications and the actual races.

Robinson stared at the man in the red sports coat, his hard round face with its fringe of crewcut blond hair frankly puzzled.

"I don't see it," he said finally. "I just damned well don't see it."

"Because," said the man, jerking a thumb upward in an expressive gesture, "my clients must be satisfied. When they are satisfied, it helps me."

"Sure," Robinson agreed sourly. "But at this track? One of *these* races doesn't mean a goddam thing. Who cares who really wins?"

"My clients like you," the man said, moving slightly. Robinson had to peer to find him in the shadows. "I want to satisfy my clients everywhere. When they are satisfied, they come back again. I like for them to keep coming back. It helps me . . ." His voice had dropped almost to a thoughtful whisper.

"I don't know," Robinson shook his head. "I never threw a race before, like this."

"It is a very simple offer," the man said. "I can only warn you that it will not be pleasant if you refuse."

"I'd sure like to quit driving," Duke said aloud, "and just live a little."

"Who wouldn't?" the man said wryly. "Who wouldn't enjoy that?"

Robinson paused, listening to the rumble of the crowd. His blond brows were pulled together thoughtfully. Finally he said, "How do you want it pulled?"

The man in the red sports coat shrugged. "That's up to you. Not obviously, of course. It must look like an accident. But give it a little spectacle if you can."

The dim cavern beneath the stands was suddenly cold. Robinson shivered, his skin prickling under his sports shirt. "I never did this before," he said, in wonderment. "I never sold out to anybody before."

The man chuckled. "Each person has only one soul to bargain with. It's high time you utilized yours." He paused, then spoke again, slowly, lifting a finger each time he made a point. "I promise you that you'll never have to drive again. I promise you an endless succession of delightful experiences. Truly, endlessly delightful. The kind of life no man has known on earth. Pleasures . . ." The enticing voice trailed off.

"Sounds good," Duke muttered.

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"It will be . . . wonderful."

"It better be! It sure as hell better be. I want to quit this damned grind. I've got a girl and I want to take things easy — with her. Go south. All right. I'll do it. I'll keep my promise — you keep yours!"

"Don't worry. Just do what is required of you. My clients will be pleased."

Robinson nodded. He started to speak, peering among the shadows for the man in the red sports coat. He stepped forward, waving his hands in a feeble effort to find him in the gloom. Then he laughed sheepishly.

No one was there at all.

Robinson shivered again, heading up toward the track, the pits, the sun.

Linda was waiting for him in the pit, with her pale gray eyes full of fear.

"I don't want you to drive today, Duke . . ."

He laughed shortly. "Why not?"

"I . . . I can't . . . can't say for sure . . . except that I'm afraid. There's something in the air . . . like the time in Kansas City when Chalky Scoins got killed . . . it's the same kind of crowd . . ."

Robinson lifted his eyes to the stands, shielding them with his hand against the sun. He saw the people, all shapes, grubby, licking their cracked lips, eyes bulging toward the track, hands kneading empty popcorn boxes, feet tapping against empty beer cans. They were waiting.

"You see it?" Linda said. "The same kind of a crowd . . ."

"Yeah," Duke said quietly. "You're right."

Around them, down the line of the pits, the engines growled louder.

"Duke, please don't drive . . ."

"I got to, honey. There's a nice little prize waiting for me. It'll take us South, set us up on the beach . . . swimming . . . the races . . . just us together, honey . . . it's what we want . . ." He kissed her and stepped back, grinning.

"Come on, Duke," said Manheim, his mechanic. "Come on. Time to roll."

Duke patted Linda's arm. "Wait for me right here."

Linda turned suddenly and ran, away from the pits, into the stands, bumping against the sweating vendors, jostling them and turning their beer to froth, running down the stairs into the darkness below the stands.

Up above, the cars thundered on the first lap around the track.

She stood in the dark. "It's the same kind of crowd," she whispered.

He wasn't driving the car, really. He was sitting up there in the stands, perhaps with the man in the red sports coat at his side, watching his body in

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the car below, roaring around the track, banging and sliding by the other shiny-bodied midgets. The crowd watched.

And then his mind snapped back into his body as he saw the north turn coming up ahead of him, with the small unrepaired hole in the brick track. Slip into that, jerk the wheel, and spin. Block a couple of the other drivers behind him. . . .

There was a smell of gasoline, a sound of engines, a whirring of invisibility around him. Now, he thought, now I throw the race. The wheels turned under him. Carefully, his fingers moved the steering wheel.

And then a thought knifed into his mind, born of years on the track. Too fast! He was going too fast for just a spin!

The right front wheel slipped into the pitted hole, caught, and the car lifted and turned in the air. Duke Robinson was flung out of the cockpit toward the concrete wall.

The world spun around him. Sly, enticing words echoed over the scream of the crowd. Never drive . . . delightful . . . endless succession . . . lifetime . . . not a lifetime . . . an *eternity!* No beach, no sun . . . nothing known on earth. On earth? No . . . endless . . . delightful . . . burning . . . not on earth. *His* idea of delight . . . you have to die to keep . . . promise . . . *promise*. . . .

His head crunched against the concrete wall.

When the last race was over, when a hot muggy twilight settled over the track, they moved out of the stadium, sighing, shaking their heads under the lights that had come on.

"God, that was tough," they said.

"He was pretty young," they said, "to die all broke to pieces."

"Did you see the way it burned?" they said.

"Like a big torch," they said.

Slowly, they flowed out of the stadium. The man in the red sports coat stood near the main entrance to the parking lot; as the main current of the crowd broke up into smaller streams, he seemed to beam at each and every individual.

Drivers stepped on starters, engines turned over and machines jerked their way along. Their occupants had but half a mind on the tangle of traffic; in reality, their eyes were still gazing at the track, seeing again the blazing wreckage, the smashup as two other racers attempted to swerve away from it, the bloody mess at the foot of the wall.

The man in the red coat savored the universal memory. As each car snaked free of the jam and, reaching the highway, gunned into high gear, he gazed after it . . . paternally.

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Note on "clever" titles: Once Alice Tilton wrote a wonderfully funny mystery-farce and called it COLD STEAL. *You glanced at the title page, thought "Nice gag," and laughed your way through the novel without ever noticing that the punning title, properly interpreted, handed the solution to you on a platter. Now go on and read Mr. Morrison's pleasing little mystery of the behavior of an alien race — and don't say you haven't been warned.*

There Ought to Be a Lore

by WILLIAM MORRISON

THERE WAS SOMETHING wrong, and Romulo Wilton-Blauger could sense it. His masculine intuition told him that on this planet something was not as it seemed to be. But his brain refused to back up his intuition, it refused to tell him what was wrong. And that, as he told his wife, was annoying.

Margaretta Blauger emitted a coarse guffaw, as if at the thought that her husband's brain could possibly tell him anything. Romulo felt his gorge rising. Damn that woman, he thought, she treats me as if I were an idiot. As if, just because I'm her husband, I have to have explanations spelled out for me in words of one syllable. As if I'm absolutely incapable of thinking of anything but my looks and my clothes, and how to run a space ship.

"I can feel it," he insisted. "After you've been on a couple of dozen planets of different kinds, you get used to the mere fact of variety. You're not impressed by differences in landscape, or gravity, or air pressure, by the fact that there are two moons or a dozen, that the sun is red or green. You take changes of that kind for granted. But there's something here that I just can't take for granted."

Margaretta said, with a patronizing smile that was almost a sneer, "You're just imagining things, Romulo, my pet. It's the high ionization of the atmosphere here."

"It's more than that," he maintained stubbornly. "There's something about the planet itself — or the people —"

"The people?" Margaretta guffawed again. "Those clods? Don't be a goddamn fool, Romulo."

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"I can't put my fingers on it, but I feel something wrong," he insisted with unusual stubbornness. "It could be the planet — the weather — the magnetic storms."

"A perfectly natural phenomenon," said Margaretta. "It has, as any one but you would know, been thoroughly investigated. The presence of two large moons, both consisting mostly of iron-nickel, is responsible for the production of unusually great tides, complicated by severe magnetic disturbances that not only affect the crust of the planet, but cause considerable atmospheric agitation as well. These disturbances find their expression in magnetic storms, whose frequency tends to increase periodically —"

"All right, all right, Margaretta. Don't start talking your next book at me."

"And why not?" demanded Margaretta. "Whose hard work do you suppose enables you to lead a life of ease and luxury? All you have to do is loll around and watch stereo novels —"

"When I'm not at the controls of the ship, or busy cooking over the electronic stove."

"While I," said Margaretta, as if he hadn't interrupted, "have to knock my brains out thinking up wise and witty observations. Goddamn you, Romulo, you're never grateful. A book a year for ten years — from *A Philosopher on Pluto* to *A Philosopher on Beta*

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Orionis — and every one of them a definite success. You think it's easy to use one's brain all the time? You might try it yourself for a change. You might try —"

Here we go again, thought Romulo. She does all the work, she supports the family, while all I do is live on her efforts, a useless parasite. Some day I'm going to break away. Some day, damn it, I'm going to get a job of my own and be independent. And then I'll tell her a few things.

Let her make fun of me all she pleases, let her jeer at my intuition. I *know* there's something wrong here. Something — unnatural.

She wouldn't see it, of course. To her this is just a dull old planet whose chief charm is that it's out of the beaten path for tourists. No natural advantages to speak of, no towering awe-inspiring mountains, no gay flower-filled forests or jungles, no sparkling seas. Nothing to be visited by any one except a writer on the lookout for a different subject, a subject she might turn into a book that hadn't been done before.

And the people don't interest her. Well, they don't interest me too much either, I must admit, but they're restful. Good solid farmer folk, concerned chiefly with scrabbling a living from their none too fertile soil. No time for frills. All they want is to be left alone. At least that's the impression I got from the couple of times I talked to them. They want to be left alone, and not be bothered by silly questions.

Wonder if they believe in the supremacy of the female. Maybe not. Maybe our civilization hasn't had much of an impact on them, and they're still in the primitive stage of believing that men are good for something. Some day, by God, men will have their proper place again. Let them talk all they want about the female being the natural superior and having a more rational mind. I don't believe it. I don't dare say it out loud, but I still don't believe females are any better than we are. I believe that given equal opportunity and equal encouragement, a man can do anything that a woman can. Anything biologically possible, of course.

Wouldn't it be nice if the natives here believed the same thing? I think I'll go down and have a talk with some of them. That interplanetary grammar I was looking at doesn't strike me as too good, but at least it gives the fundamentals of the language clearly enough. And I'm good at languages. Better than Margaretta, despite her so-called superior mind. Maybe I can't speak perfectly, but at least I'm fluent, and I can usually understand what the natives say.

Margaretta will want to know where I've been, she'll bawl me out for wasting my time sight-seeing instead of sweeping out the ship and making it the kind of home she thinks it should be, but to hell with her. I'm not her slave.

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I'll go without my coat, too. I know that the weather here is a little cooler than I'm used to, but I'm tougher than she thinks. I can take cold as well as she can, or better.

He got down from the ship almost furtively, despite his brave thoughts. But Margaretta was not there to see. Margaretta, as he had hoped, was busy meditating, letting her thoughts wander, as a true philosopher should, to gather ideas.

He walked along the ground, a little chilled, but in a reckless mood that denied the low level of the temperature. The air, he told himself, was not cold, but bracing. Bracing. That was the right word for it. The ground was rough and rocky, with the brownish redness of iron rust; and only a few scattered blades of something that might be called grass was present to break the monotony of the harsh color. But there were plants growing in the next field. Plants growing, and a couple of farmers working with hoes to clear out weeds and break the hard crust of the soil. He'd talk to them.

When he came close, they looked at him slowly, as was their way, and then turned back to their work. They didn't seem interested in him.

He flushed a little. I'm not so interested in you either, he thought. I'm just trying to be friendly. And find out what's wrong around here. Am I hurting you by looking?

There were two of them, and the faces of both were red and weather-beaten from sun and wind, with a bluish tinge that must come from some peculiarity of their body chemistry. They were dressed differently, but it was hard to say whether the difference in clothes reflected a difference in sex or not. One wore what looked like pants, the other what might have been a skirt. But in a culture as strange to him as theirs, how could he know which sex wore the pants and which the skirts?

"Looks like a nice day," he said. That was the way you talked to farmers, he thought. The weather, always the weather. It meant a lot to them.

One of them grunted. The one with the skirt.

He took that for an answer and went on, "Kind of cloudy, though. Think it might rain?"

"Rain will make no difference."

"You don't mind working in the rain?"

"No difference. A farmer's skin sheds water like a gunkel's."

"Gunkel? That's a kind of bird, isn't it?"

No answer but a grunt. They didn't seem to want to keep up their end of the conversation. All right, he thought, you don't want to talk, you don't have to. Go ahead and work, chop up your weeds, break up the soil crust. You don't mind if I watch, do you?

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He watched, but in five minutes they said nothing, and he grew tired of standing there like a dull clod himself, and moved on. There were a couple of kids playing in a neighboring meadow, and he went over to take a look at them.

The kids were playing a game. They laid pieces of dirty rope on the ground in long rows, and then in other rows across them, and at a certain point each kid grabbed two stray ends of rope and pulled. The knots in the rope assumed strange designs.

The kids talked some and sang more, but there were words in the songs that his dictionary didn't have — nonsense syllables, he suspected. And not being a kid himself, he quickly lost interest. He moved on.

He reached a small stone village. Here there were more people, and they moved around slowly, sleepily, as if they had all the time in the world.

"Nice day," said one of them — not to Romulo.

"Looks like it might rain later, though," replied another. "Blue sun at noon means water pour soon."

There it was, thought Romulo, they *were* interested in the weather. Not when I talk about it, though. They regard *me* as a stranger.

The two moons were rising now, and seemed not too far apart. The air in the east was electric with energy, bluer than the air in any other direction, and he wondered if a magnetic storm mightn't be coming up. If it was, it didn't appear to bother them.

He shivered suddenly, and wondered if he hadn't better be getting back to the ship. Margaretta would wonder where he was, and she'd be sore as a boil if he was late.

To hell with her, he thought. If she asks me where I've been, I can tell her I've been making notes on native customs. I've been helping her collect material for her book. I'm getting to know these farmers, I'm starting to learn their psychology —

He shivered again, and suddenly his teeth were chattering. Damn it, it isn't just chilly, it's freezing. I should never have been fool enough to come out without a coat.

One of the farmers, a pants-wearer, was staring at him curiously. "K-kind of w-warm for this time of year," said Romulo.

"You are cold."

"C-cold as hell."

"When the two moons rise together, that is always a sign of cold weather."

"Any place I could go to warm up?"

"You have a ship?"

"It's too far away."

"You came farther to get here," said the farmer. And walked away.

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Romulo tried to curse him, but his teeth were chattering too much. There, he thought, was real peasant hospitality. And peasant shrewdness. "You came farther than that to get here." You came God knows how many light-years to reach this planet where you're not wanted. Well, we don't like you or your kind. Go back where you came from.

Another one stopped near him, this one wearing a skirt. "You are cold."

"N-no. I'm j-just sh-shivering with d-delight to b-be here."

"When the cold is in the bones, it is time to heat the stones. Come with me."

He or she led him into a large stone hut. In one corner, another peasant in skirts reclined about six feet off the floor on large flat stones. From beneath the stones, through the crannies between them, there came a dull red light. A fire below, heated stones on top. Primitive enough. But warm. With a warmth to comfort a frozen if civilized soul.

He climbed with difficulty on top of the heap of stones and lay down alongside the skirted peasant. A wave of radiant heat swept through him. Ah, this is what a fowl would feel if it were alive during that first fraction of a second in an electronic oven. Let them roast me and eat me if they want to, I no longer care. This feels too good. Hot sunlight on a sandy beach never felt better.

People were coming in and out all around him. He felt lazy and uninclined to move, but he wasn't sleepy. He heard them clearly, listened to every word of their uninspiring conversation. How were the crops this year on your place? Not too good, not too bad. Not enough rain. When the weather is dry, the children will cry. When the sky is too clear, the farmer must fear. A pleasant summer makes a sad harvest. And so on.

How is your wife? As well as can be expected. Romulo raised his head and saw that the second speaker, like the first, wore skirts. So the women wear the pants here, he thought.

My wife is also well. But she was ailing last week. There is no greater nuisance than an ailing woman. The rest of her may be helpless, but her tongue can still wag.

He listened with admiration. The men here aren't afraid to talk back, he thought.

How is your little son? Well enough. He is almost seven now. Time to take him out of school and set him to work. He learns nothing useful in the classroom. He must be taught to make his own way. Helpless hands make an empty stomach.

And your daughter? A shrug. What does one expect of a daughter? Some day another man's young fool will take her off my hands. Until then, one must bear one's sorrows. A daughter eats and is good for nothing.

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If women could bear horkops instead of daughters, this would be a better world. A horkop, at least, can pull a plow.

Real peasant wisdom, thought Romulo. Nice material for the book, although Margaretta wouldn't like it.

There was more like it, much more. But through it all, pleasant as it was to listen, the old thought began to nag again. Something was wrong. Something —

Someone burst suddenly into the room. "Where is my husband?"

Margaretta. Margaretta in a vile temper. One of the skirted peasants looked at her and said, "Words are to a woman what venom is to a skloop. Both create wounds that fester."

"Especially in a weak husband. When women rule men, the gods laugh and the men weep."

Margaretta's linguistic ability wasn't great enough to let her understand these comments. She looked blank, and raised her voice again. "Romulo! Where are you?"

Romulo said tremulously, "Here I am, dear."

"Romulo, you fool, what are you doing up there? Have you no sense of decency?"

"I was cold — it grows cold very suddenly here — and one of the men let me warm myself on this stove."

"It didn't grow cold suddenly. It's been cold all along, but you didn't have sense enough to take your coat." She stared up at him with distaste. "I'll bet it's filthy up there. These peasants have no idea of cleanliness."

"I didn't notice."

"A woman's tongue," commented one peasant, "can split a husband's head better than any ax."

"How true!" thought Romulo. Aloud, he said, "All I know is that it's warm up here, and that's enough for me."

"Don't talk to me like that. Damn you, Romulo, come down this moment. You're going to come home with me right now and take a bath."

For a moment he thought wildly of telling her to go to hell. Who do you think you're talking to, anyway? he would demand. I'm a free citizen of the System, I take orders from no one. I may be your husband, but you can't talk to me that way. I'm leaving you right now. From now on I make my own way. From now on —

Prudence restrained him. Suppose it turned out that he couldn't eat the native food here? A fine fix he'd be in. He'd have to come crawling back, and she'd never let him forget it. Never in all his life. They might travel on a hundred planets, but this one would stick out in his memory as the site of the Great Defiance — and the Ignoble Surrender.

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He said meekly, "Yes, dear," and began to climb down.

A peal of thunder came from outside.

The skirted farmers looked at each other. One intoned, "The gods have eaten an ill-cooked dinner, and they belch. Soon they will weep in pain."

Margaretta said to them sharply, in an almost incomprehensible accent, "What does that mean?"

"Storm come," said one.

"It's going to rain, love," said Romulo.

"Rain? I didn't see any sign —" She poked her head out of the doorway, but at once drew it back again. "Great Scott, what's going on out there? That's no rain!"

A peasant stared out, then looked at his fellow. "Stones fly about."

"But there's no rain!" said Margaretta accusingly to Romulo.

"I must have misunderstood them," said Romulo meekly, and a little puzzled. "They talked about the gods weeping —"

"The gods not weep as we do," put in one peasant.

"Stone gods weep stone tears," observed his fellow sage.

"So that's it. It's a magnetic storm, dear," said Romulo, suddenly realizing. "The magnetic disturbances are connected somehow with the two moons."

"Oh, yes. I remember now reading about it. Many of the stones consist of magnetite, which is a magnetic iron oxide, and under the remarkable magnetic forces they rise into the air and whirl around."

You remember now, he thought. But you didn't remember until I reminded you. So don't try to treat me like an idiot child. I've got a mind of my own, and I can use it.

A sharp crack came from the roof of the house. Lucky there was little wood around here, he thought, and the houses had to be made of stone. Otherwise they'd never withstand the pounding of these pieces of flying iron ore. Another crack from the right of the house, then one from the other side. The tempo began to speed up, as if some master drummer were pounding on the house. A terrific tattoo, with peals of thunder accenting the beats like cymbal clashes, the total effect having a sinister musical quality that he was in no mood to appreciate.

It was a good half hour before the pounding finally died away. When she had at last assured herself that there was no further danger, Margaretta said, "Come, Romulo. It's time to get back to the ship."

At the ship, he showered without a word and then set about preparing dinner. They ate late, and Margaretta cursed him for it, but he didn't mind. He had figured out what was wrong.

"There ought to be a lore," he said aloud, without intending to.

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"What's that?" demanded his wife sharply.

"Nothing, dear. I was just thinking.'

"If you can think, pigs can fly," she said contemptuously.

Not the kind of remark you'd expect from a philosopher, he thought. After that they ate in silence.

The next day, while she was meditating, he slipped out again. This time he wore a coat, but even if he hadn't, he would have been too excited to feel the cold. The thing to do, he thought, is to stay away from them. Stay away from the village, stay away from the groups in the fields, from the children playing. Those are decoys, intended to attract your attention, distract your attention. Distract it from what?

In a deserted section of one field, he began to prowl about. He wasn't sure of what he was looking for, but he knew there must be something. A rock, a grove of trees, a pool of water, anything might give him a clue.

A skirted peasant approached him. "This field is privately owned, stranger."

"I know. You want me to get away?"

"You have no business here."

"You don't want me around. That's a good sign."

"Those who speak in puzzles, by rights should wear muzzles."

"Don't give me that peasant act," said Romulo. "I'm wise."

The man looked at him, his manner surly and stupid.

"You're no more a peasant than I am. And don't bother thinking up one of your proverbs about the weather again, either. It won't do a thing to prove how rustic and down to earth you are."

Two more peasants, both in pants, were approaching. The first one said, "He knows."

"Well, I wouldn't say that. I don't know too much, but I suspect an awful lot. You're not peasants, and there's something here that you're hiding. If I had time, I'd find out what it is."

"You have no time," said the one in skirts. The other two ranged themselves one on either side of him. "You had better come with us."

The ground seemed to open up in front of them, and they went into it and down a flight of steps. Overhead the ground closed again, but it wasn't dark. A light that came from some invisible source glowed gently all around them. Just like a Circum light, he thought. And they were pretending to be backward peasants.

Romulo felt a dryness in his throat, but he told himself that was only natural. He was nervous, not scared. They wouldn't dare do anything to him. They wouldn't dare —

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One of the peasants in pants said, "Why did you come to this field?"

"Because you gave yourselves away. I didn't think you would hurt me — I felt that you weren't really vicious."

They exchanged glances at that.

"And I was very curious. Curiosity is supposed to be our racial failing."

"Why shouldn't we hurt you? If we go to the trouble to hide something that seems to us important, why would we let you escape to tell about it?"

"But I *won't* tell. I have no intention of telling. If I had felt any hostility to you, I wouldn't have let you know I had penetrated your disguises. I'd have kept it quiet until I could get away."

"So you were inspired by idle curiosity alone?"

"Well, I must admit there was something else. My wife thinks I'm stupid. I wanted to prove to her that I was smarter than she was. She didn't even suspect there was anything wrong. And when I told her there was, she laughed at me."

"And now you intend to come to her with the proof that you were right?"

"Oh, no," he said hastily. "I want to keep the knowledge to myself. All I'm going to do is laugh at her without her knowing it. It's just a matter of building up my ego, I suppose. I've been stepped on so much —"

The skirted peasant asked curiously, "Are all your men so neurotic?"

"Neurotic? I don't think I'm exactly neurotic. But men are supposed to be an inferior sex, and I suppose that like most other people I've accepted that as a fact. I don't really believe it, though. Not deep down inside me. Nor do most men. There's supposed to have been a time when men were actually women's superiors. That was before the great atomic wars, the first wars in which the home front was more dangerous than the actual battle front. So many women were killed then that the few who remained were treasured almost as if they were goddesses. They made use of the competition among the men to seize power, and they've never lost it since. Some day, I suppose, we'll regain our superiority again," he said wistfully.

One of the peasants in pants said, "Nonsense. In a truly civilized race, there is equality, not superiority. As among us."

"Among you? But I thought —"

"We were pretending to be primitive. And among a few primitive groups, it is the men who are considered superior."

"Oh. I'd love to tell that to Margaretta."

"You will not tell her anything."

There was something ominous in the way he said it. Romulo almost bleated, "But — but I have to get back!"

"It is not at all necessary. Your race has billions of individuals. It will

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be able to spare you. And you will no longer be forced to suffer indignation at your wife's hands."

What a sense of humor, thought Romulo wildly. What a comedian he is, to joke about my death! Romulo cried out, almost in panic, "If I don't get back, Margaretta will start looking for me, and once she does that, everything you're hiding, whatever it is, will come out. And you can't hurt her, either. She's too prominent a person, and she's registered her ship for this destination. If she doesn't return, they'll investigate. They'll be sure to investigate. Our people are very suspicious of accidents on strange planets. We've had experience with hostile races before, and we don't believe in accidents."

"Your disappearance will cause a difficult problem," said the skirted peasant slowly. "But we have solved problems even more difficult."

"Don't be so callous about me! You don't have to kill me or create a problem at all. All you have to do is let me go."

Heads shook.

"I won't tell. I'll give you my solemn word that I won't tell. As I have already pointed out —"

"What is it that you will not tell?"

"Whatever it is that you're hiding. I hoped that you'd show me that. I didn't believe I'd be able to find it myself, so I attracted your attention by looking." And curiosity for a moment mastering panic, Romulo demanded, "What *are* you hiding?"

The three of them exchanged glances again. Finally one said, "It can do no harm now. Come."

They led Romulo down another very steep flight of steps. A door slid open at their approach, and then closed behind them.

Romulo gasped. This was a sight, an evidence of civilization he had never dreamed of. Instead of going deeper underground, he seemed to have come out into the open air. He saw low graceful buildings, beautiful trees, smooth inviting lawns. People were strolling, children were playing. Small furry animals raced around. Over head, although no sun was visible, there was the blue of a sunny sky, through which birds flashed.

He gazed for an instant, and then opened his mouth to give expression to his feelings. At that moment, one of the peasants drew him back. The door opened, he was behind it, it closed again.

"That is part of what we are hiding," said the skirted peasant. "A way of life. A way we treasure. We want nothing to do with your vaunted civilization. It corrupts all it touches. We want to be left alone." And he added, almost with pity, "You should not have pried."

"If your tourists knew," said one of those in pants, "they would descend

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upon us in swarms. We have gone to great trouble to prevent them from knowing. We are willing to go to the slight additional trouble of putting you out of the way."

"But you don't have to! You don't have to be afraid of me!"

"We are afraid of nothing. We have factories too, and we can defend ourselves if need be. But we regard killing as uncivilized. We prefer a method of harmless deceit such as we have used up to now. It is unfortunate that you compel us to resort to what we have so far avoided."

Romulo said, "*I'm* compelling you? I'm holding a blast-gun to your heads and making you hurt me? Don't be silly!"

"We still have not decided what your fate will be. But the choice is limited. Either death, or a long sleep. It must be one or the other."

Romulo felt his heart skip a beat. For people who didn't like killing, they talked about it with remarkable callousness. Dead, or as good as dead. What a choice he was going to have! He almost burst out laughing at the thought of it.

Laughter, he knew, meant hysteria. He got a grip on himself. "I must put my thoughts in order," he told himself. "Think, Romulo, think fast. You can't threaten them, you can't bribe them, you can't cajole them with your undoubted charm. But maybe — ah, that's it!"

"I have something to offer you," he said aloud, and the words tumbled out of him so fast they almost tripped over each other. "In exchange for my life, which you don't really want, I'll give you something you do want. Something very important to you, something you can't do without."

"And what is that?"

"I'll tell you what you left out of your system! So the next time somebody like me comes along, somebody who has sharp eyes and an inquisitive disposition, he won't notice anything wrong, and won't tell other people about his suspicions. He'll never be able to blurt out the truth, and cause an investigation. My life against what I've discovered. That's a fair exchange, isn't it?"

Would they accept? Another silence, in which Romulo's heart pounded fiercely.

One of the skirted ones said slowly, "It is a fair exchange. Tell us."

"You're missing a *lore*," he said eagerly. "That's because you're not farmers yourselves, and you had to get all your knowledge about farmers out of books — out of our books, I think, so that you'd be able to impress *us*. Farmers talk about the weather, farmers talk about their wives and children, about their animals.

"But you've overlooked something. Farmers and fishermen and hunters all have their lore — their stock of knowledge, usually expressed in proverbs —

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about their own conditions of life. You have no lore about yours. What's the great fact about life on the surface of this planet? Why, the magnetic storms, caused by your peculiar moons. But you spend so little of your time on the surface that when a magnetic storm did come up, it took you by surprise. A couple of your people even predicted rain!"

One of the peasants actually seemed to be smiling.

"That's right, they predicted that the gods would 'weep in pain.' After the stones began to fly about, they had no proverb to fit the situation. They did manage to gloss over the mistake with some nonsense about stone gods weeping stone tears. It fooled me at the time, but later, when I thought it over, I realized how feeble an evasion it was. You have no lore about magnetic storms. Your proverbs have nothing about magnetic forces. Once I realized that fact, I knew you weren't real farmers. I knew you were hiding something."

"From now on," said the skirted peasant, "there will be a magnetic lore. 'When north meets south, the stones fly.' 'A fat woman with a pretty face and pretty feet is like a magnet; it is her middle which does not attract.' And so on."

"That's the idea," said Romulo. "That's all you need."

"Where in hell have you been?" demanded Margaretta nastily.

"Looking around," said Romulo, with calculated vagueness.

"You like it here?"

"It's nice."

"If that's what you think, we leave. Any place that you like is sure to have something wrong with it."

"I thought you wanted to do a book —"

"There isn't enough to write about. I've been 'looking around' too, and there isn't a thing here that appeals to me. Not a thing."

"Whatever you say, dear," agreed Romulo mildly, thinking of what went on underground. And he added, half aloud, "A magnet even without brains seeks the north; but it is a wise woman who can always point to the truth."

"What was that?" she said sharply.

"Nothing, dear, nothing at all," replied Romulo. "Just a bit of lore I picked up here."

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This is Howard Rigsby's first science fiction story; but his name is certainly familiar to you if you've read the better pulp magazines in the 1940's or hardcover mysteries a few years ago or paperback originals today. Indeed, Mr. Rigsby's AS A MAN FALLS *(Gold Medal) must rank as one of 1954's strongest psychological analyses of murder, in soft or hard covers. For his s. f. debut, he offers a touching vignette, in which a familiar theme of future history is seen through fresh eyes.*

One Fine Day

by HOWARD RIGSBY

BY THE TIME he reached his ninetieth year Don Guillermo Sanchez cared little about living longer. For one thing, the climate had changed lately. When he had been born in the town of Monterey, California, the climate had been fine and warm. He had been born in 1870, and up until the past few years, with the exception of a few unusual summers, one could count upon a procession of clear days from early March through October. Now, however, a milky blur always lay over the sky, and though they had told him it was an anti-bacteriological mist created by the new machines he did not understand it. Indeed, he was only vaguely aware of the war in progress, so innocent of the grim affairs of the great outer world was he.

During this third year of the 1960's there were many days when he did not even bother to get out of bed. He would lie fasting and meditating, an old man roaming the boundless main of time, lying in the same bed and in the same house where he had been born, lying there between two screaming arterials of the little city that had grown up about him. And sometimes the thoughts that came to him were curious indeed. Lately, for instance, he had come to believe that the universe was like a walnut, just one great mind dreaming in a shell.

Even so, he missed the lovely blue vault the sky had been. He missed the sunny days in his patio among the old fruit trees, the puttering among his vegetables. And, though he could dream of these things, it was never quite the same. Though for days he might lie and think of the sun, he could never quite feel it on his cheek. Nor did he wish one of the enriched-ray lamps that were supposed to give you all that the sun had given, just

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as the little green pills were supposed to provide you with everything the crisp fresh lettuce in his garden used to. To him it seemed he might die content if only he might feel once more the sun, look down the slot between the buildings that had grown up about him and see the bay, blue in the sun, with the sun shining on the fishing boats lying there.

Sometimes now there would be a flash of light that was like the sun, a light that hurt the eyes even through the mist; and then, though he was almost deaf, he would hear the siren and the great voice from the tower in the center of the town. The voice, harsh and hortatory, would beat against his eardrums and suddenly the heavy pounding of traffic on the arterials would stop and perhaps there would be a sound of planes above the mist and then Don Guillermo would know that the flash he had seen had marked the fall of some distant city. But afterward he would remember only that the light had been for an instant like the sun. And, after a pause, the big trucks would charge past steadily again along the roads, going to and from the underground war factories back in the hills, and Don Guillermo would stand in his patio and watch them, looking out over the old wall. He would see the convoys, too, the mask-like faces of the soldiers and the huge atomic guns, the weird-looking antennae of the great radar and guided-missile units. He would remember the days of his youth before the advent of this pale, dream-like race, when Indians still came into town from the hills and clipper ships and the side-wheeled steamers of the Panama Mail Line put into the bay. He would hear again the sound of horses, the murmur of soft Spanish words and mandolins in the night. He would remember the flowers, the ripe fruit, the birds singing. He would stand in the patio remembering these old things, remembering the sun. And after a while he would turn his face up to the purblind sky and pray.

"Let it shine just once more," he would whisper. "I want to cast a shadow again before I die."

In the shadowless demi-world he would shut himself in the old house. The adobe walls were four feet thick and within them he was insulated from the noise of the town. With all the doors and windows shut the traffic sounds were a distant buzzing and even when there were sirens he would only wake to think perhaps he had heard a child crying — that was all; that and the steady day-and-night *hum* of the big machines that created the sterilizing mist which was supposed to nullify the enemy's bacteria attacks.

But without the sun his strength waned and as the summer of '63 passed it became an effort to rise at all and each night he composed himself for sleep with the knowledge that he might not wake. Then one night he thought that death had come, for in his dream there was a terrible con-

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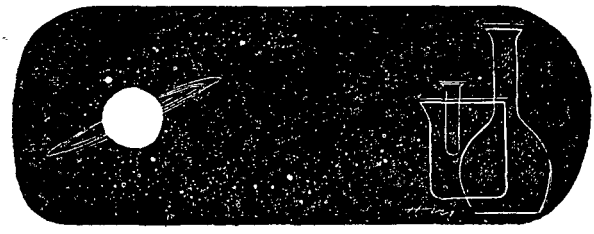
fusion, a wailing and a shaking of the earth and finally a mighty hand smashed the walnut that was the universe and then of course there was nothing left, no sound, no voice, no substance, only a vast expanding silence.

At that point Don Guillermo opened his eyes and saw the room filled with a wonderful brilliance; and, as in his dream, everything was still. Even the *hum* of the great mist-making machines had stopped.

Wonderingly he rose from his bed. He flung wide the door and gazed in astonishment at the great blue vault of sky. He stood there in his night-shirt with the sun on his cheeks while tears of joy came to his eyes, and when he stepped out into the patio he felt surely he must be dreaming because all the buildings were gone. Now it was just as it had been in his youth. Beyond the wall he could see the whole bay, undefiled by wharf or ship, with only the squat, thick-walled customs house at its edge, and for a moment he listened hopefully for the sound of horses, but there was none, no sound at all, not even of birds. There was only a flock of gulls drifting slowly, high in the lovely sky. Then he noticed the plum tree that grew against the wall. Except for one sere leaf it was bare, but beside the leaf there was a plum, and though it was tiny and withered and laden with the poison that filled the air, it appeared quite marvellous to Don Guillermo. He plucked it gently and ate it, and afterward he felt dizzy and was grateful to sit for a moment on a bench.

Meanwhile, the flock of gulls drifted lower in the sky, and soon it could be seen that it was composed of men. They wore masks and plastic suits and their instruments and weapons glittered in the sun. Below them now the only hint of life came from the shattered voice box on the fallen tower, a hoarse, unintelligible whisper that went on and on. And now the sun, inching higher, fell upon Don Guillermo's splendid head and there was a smile upon the lips, a man-like shadow upon the ground.



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The old-fashioned ghost story laid its stress simply upon the specter. The modern tale of haunting, from Henry James to Graham Greene, emphasizes the soul of the haunted; "the ghosts," as Elizabeth Bowen has written, "build themselves up out of the neuroses of those who see them — as though the seers had been selected prey." This quiet and touching story by Jack Finney perfectly illustrates the thesis that an apparition must arise out of deep need, psychic and psychological, on the part of both the haunter and the haunted, the seen and the seer — and introduces a kind of ghost unlike any other we have ever read.

There Is a Tide . . .

by JACK FINNEY

I'LL SAY THIS for myself, and it's something that gripes me: if I had any other story to tell — if I said I'd seen a blue horse, a wild antelope or a three-toed sloth in my apartment — I'd finally be believed by the people who know me, when they saw I wasn't kidding, because I'm simply not the kind of guy to pull a pointless hoax. And I'm not a pathological liar.

I'm normal, I'm average, I even look like most people. I'm sound in body and limb, if not in wind; I'm married; twenty-eight years old; and I don't "imagine" or "dream" things that aren't so — a particularly exasperating explanation a number of people have offered me. I'll admit that at least once a week I imagine I'm president of McCreedy & Cluett, the big candy and cough-sirup company I work for, and once I even dreamed I was. But believe me, I don't sit down in the president's office and start giving orders. In the daytime, anyway, I have no trouble remembering that I'm actually assistant sales manager; no trouble distinguishing reality from dreams.

The point I'm beating you over the head with is that if I say I saw a ghost, people who know me ought to remember these things. I don't mind a few snickers at first; this sounds ridiculous, and I know it. In a modern, seventeen-story New York apartment building on East Sixty-eighth Street, I saw a plump, middle-aged ghost wearing rimless glasses. So snicker if you want, but at least consider the evidence before you laugh out loud.

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I saw the ghost in my own living room, alone, between 3 and 4 in the morning, and I was there, wide awake, for a perfectly sound reason: I was worrying. The candy we make is doing pretty well, but the cough sirup isn't. It only sells by the carloads, that is, and the company would naturally prefer to measure sales in trainloads — big, long trains with two engines. That wasn't my problem as much as Ted Haymes, the sales manager's. But I did see a chance in the whole situation, to put it bluntly, of beating him out of his job, and I worried about it, at the office, at home, at the movies, while kissing Louisa hello, good-by or what's new. Also while awake or asleep.

On this particular night, my conscience and I woke up around 3, all set for some wrestling. I didn't want to disturb Louisa; so I grabbed the spare blanket and bundled up on the davenport in the living room. I did *not* sleep; I want to make that plain. I was full of my problem and wide awake. The street outside was dead; there'd be minutes at a time when not a car went by, and once, when a pedestrian passed, I could distinctly hear his footsteps three stories below. The room was dark, except for the windows outlined by the street lamp, and with no distractions the battle of ambition versus conscience began. I reminded myself of the spectacular variety of ways in which Ted Haymes was a heel; you could hardly ask for a more deserving victim. Besides, I wouldn't be knifing him in the back, or anything.

I rationalized, I explained, I hunted for a way of talking myself into doing what I wanted to do, and maybe half an hour went by. I guess I'd been staring through the darkness down at the davenport, or the floor, or the cigarette in my hand, or something. Anyway, I happened to glance up, and there, clearly silhouetted against the street light, a man stood at the living-room windows with his back to me, staring down at the street.

My first quick thought was burglar or prowler, but in that same instant I knew it wasn't. His whole attitude and posture were wrong for it, because he simply stood there, motionless, staring down through the window. Oh, of course he moved a little; shifting his weight slightly, altering the position of his head a little. But in every way it was the attitude of a man up in the middle of the night over some problem.

Then he turned back into the room, and for an instant the street light caught his face from the side, and I saw it clearly. It was the face of a man around 60; round, plump, undistinguished. He was quite bald and wore glasses, the eyes behind them wide in thought, and in that pale, harsh light I saw he was wearing a bathrobe, and I knew it was no prowler; I knew it was a ghost.

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"How did you know?" some of my wiseacre friends have asked. "Was he transparent, yak, yak, yak?" No, he wasn't. "No long white sheet with holes for the eyes?" several dozen people with rare, rich senses of humor have asked. No, this figure moving in the faint light looked ordinary, harmless and real. And I knew it *wasn't*, that's all. I just knew.

"How did you feel?" people have asked, trying to keep their faces straight. I was terrified. The figure turned absently into the room, and he began to walk toward the hall leading to the bedroom and bathroom, and I could feel the thousands of separate little follicles on my head prickle and swell.

He did a strange thing. From the windows to the hall, the path is clear, yet he altered his direction for several steps, exactly as though he were walking around some piece of furniture that was no longer there.

And all up and down the middle of my back, the skin turned suddenly cold. I was horribly frightened, and I don't like the memory of it. Yet I wasn't worried. I felt no threat, that is, toward Louisa or me. I had the idea — the certainty, in fact — that for him I wasn't there at all, just as that invisible object *was* still there for him. And I knew, as he turned into the hall, out of my sight, that he wasn't going into the bedroom where Louisa lay, or into the bathroom, or anywhere else in that apartment. I knew he was going back into whatever time and place he had momentarily appeared from.

Our apartment is small, with just about adequate closet and cupboard space for a large family of mice. It took only a few minutes to search every last place a man might be hiding, and he was gone, as I'd known he would be. Some ghost, eh? A chubby, middle-aged ghost in a ratty old bathrobe; and not a moan, groan or peep out of him.

You know what occurred to me later, lying in bed wondering when I'd be able to sleep again? It just shows what silly thoughts you can have in the dark, especially when you've seen a ghost. He'd looked like a man who was fighting his conscience, and I suddenly wondered if it were the ghost of myself, half a lifetime later, still troubled by guilt, still talking myself into one more thing I knew I shouldn't do. My hair is thinning a little at the crown; I suppose I'll be bald someday. And if you added rimless glasses, 40 pounds and 30 years . . . I was actually a little frightened, and, lying there in the darkness, I decided that next morning I was going to stop Ted Haymes from taking the step that would probably get me his job.

At breakfast, I couldn't quite bring myself to tell Louisa about my decision or what had happened; it was just too silly in the daylight. Louisa talked, though — about cough sirup and sales plans, promotions and more money,

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and bigger apartments, with a shrewd, intelligent, fur-coat look in her eyes. I mumbled some answers, feeling depressed. Then I put on my Homburg and left for the office, looking like a rising young executive and wishing I were dead.

Right after I got there, Ted strolled into my office and sat down on the corner of my desk, pushing my papers aside — a remarkably annoying and absolutely typical thing for him to do. He started yapping about his big new cough-sirup sales plan, of course; it was simple, direct, inexpensive, and would sound good to the boss — I knew that. He had it all dressed up, but basically his play was distributing samples, in miniature bottles, during nice, brisk, pneumonia weather. He'd gotten cost figures, and he was about ready to present the plan and wanted to know if I agreed.

For a minute I just sat there, knowing his plan would flop, and him along with it. Then I just shrugged and said, Yeah, I guessed he was ready. I was astonished; but at the same time I knew why I'd changed my mind. You've known someone like Ted if you ever worked in an office; they're standard equipment, like filing cabinets. He happens to be tall and skinny, though they come in all shapes, a bumptious sort of guy with a hideous, mocking horse laugh. He's a know-it-all, a pincher of stenographers, a credit hog — I've got to watch him all the time to see that I get any recognition for the work our department does — and even when he's patting you on the back, there's a sneer in his eyes.

Sitting at my desk after he'd left, I was perfectly willing again to give him the business. Then, unaccountably, the image of the ghost at my living-room windows flashed up in my mind. It made me suddenly furious — I didn't know why — and I knew I wanted that ghost explained and exorcised. Somehow I knew I had to get him out of my apartment and out of my mind.

Now, the building I live in is no ancient, crumbling castle with a history hopelessly shrouded in the mists of time. It was built in 1939 and is managed by Thomas L. Persons Company, a big realty firm. So I reached for the Manhattan telephone book, looked up their number and called them.

A girl answered in a brisk, bitter voice, and I explained that I was a rent-paying customer and wanted to know if she could tell me the names of previous tenants of my apartment. From the way she said, "Certainly not!" you'd think I'd made an indecent proposal. I persisted, spoke to three more people and finally reached a man who grudgingly consented to open the archives and get me what I wanted.

A woman and her mother — no men in the family — had occupied my apartment from 1940 till 1949, when we moved in. In 1939, and for a few

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months after, the apartment's first tenants had lived there: a Mr. Harris L. Gruener — pronounced Greener — and his wife. The ghost was Gruener, I insisted to myself, and if it could possibly be done, I was going to prove that it was, and that it had nothing to do with me.

That night, around 3, I woke up again, took the blanket from the foot of the bed and settled down on the davenport to settle Ted's hash. Deliberately I worked myself into a tough, ruthless frame of mind. "Business is business," I said to myself, lying there smoking in the dark. "All's fair, et cetera, and Ted Haymes would certainly do it to me, if the situation were reversed."

The nice thing was that I didn't actually have to *do* anything. I'd worked for a much smaller candy and cough-sirup company, before McCreedy & Cluett; and they had once tried what was virtually Ted's plan. It had looked good, sounded good — and it had failed completely. We figured out why. Except for the tiny fraction of people who happened to have coughs at the moment we gave out our samples, most of them dropped our little bottles into overcoat pockets, where they stayed for days. Presently they may have reached the shelves of medicine cabinets; and maybe eventually they were used, and even resulted in sales. But the immediate sales results of the plan were zero. And it was dropped, just as fast as we could let go.

I knew it would happen again. All I had to do was say nothing and look doubtful. When it failed, I'd be the man with the sales instinct who'd been pretty doubtful about the plan from the start, and — not right away, of course, but presently — I'd have Ted's job, and he'd be out. It wasn't sure-fire, but I had nothing to lose, and I lay there working out the best way of subtly getting my doubts on record with the boss.

Yet that wasn't all I was doing, and I knew it. It was the dead of night, utterly silent outside and in, and I knew I was also waiting for a ghost, and that I was actually afraid to light another cigarette.

And then the ghost came strolling in from the hall, his head down on his chest, wearing that mangy old bathrobe. He crossed the room to the windows, and then just stood there again, staring down at the street. For twenty minutes or so, he went through the same performance as he had the night before. I don't mean identically, every movement the same, like a movie you see twice. I had the feeling this was another night for him, and that he was up once again, standing at that window, working over the same old problem, whatever it was.

Then he left, just as before, walking around the invisible object that was no longer there, and I knew he was walking through another time.

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I had to do something. I *knew* I had to prove to myself that this ghost had nothing to do with me, and I walked out to the hall telephone and, with my hands trembling, looked up Gruener in the telephone book. There were several listed, but, as I'd expected, no Harris L. Feeling relieved and a bit silly, now, I tried the Brooklyn directory — and there it was. *Harris L. Gruener*, it said in cold, black type, with a telephone number and address, and then I was really panicky. For now it seemed certain that Gruener was nothing more than a previous tenant of this apartment, who lived in Brooklyn now, and had no connection with the ghost. And if the ghost wasn't Gruener . . . I wouldn't let myself think about that now, and I went to bed knowing where I had to go in the morning.

The house when I finally found it far out in Brooklyn, was a small white cottage; there was nothing unusual about it. A kid's bike and an old ball bat, split and wrapped with tape, were lying on the front porch. I pressed the button, and a musical chime sounded inside; then a woman in a house dress and apron came to the door. She was in her early thirties, I'd say; nice-looking but overworked. "Mr. Gruener?" I said.

She shook her head. "He's at work now." I'd half expected that and wished I'd telephoned first, but then she added, "Or do you mean his father?"

"Well," I said, "I'm not sure. I want Harris L. Mr. Harris L. Gruener."

"Oh," she answered, "he's around in the back yard." She smiled embarrassedly. "You mind walking around the side of the house? I'd ask you through, but it's in kind of a mess yet, and —"

"Of course not." I smiled understandingly, thanked her, touching my hat, then followed the walk around to the back yard. A moment or so later, fumbling with the latch of the rusted wire gate, I glanced up, and there in a garden lounge chair across the yard, face up to the sun, sat my Mr. Gruener.

It was a relief and at the same time a cold shock, an utterly frightening thing, and I just stood there, my hand still automatically fumbling with the gate, my mind churning to make sense out of this. I'd seen no ghost, I explained to myself; this man must be insane and had twice broken into my apartment in some unguessable way for some mad, secret reason. Then, as I got the gate open, Gruener opened his eyes, and I knew that I *had* seen a ghost.

For there, watching me approach, smiling pleasantly in greeting, was unquestionably the face I'd seen staring down at the street from my apartment window — but now it was a dozen years older. Now it was the face of a man in his seventies, looser, the muscle tone gone, the skin softer. With a courteous gesture of his hand, the old man invited me to take a chair be-

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side him, and I sat down, knowing that what I'd seen in my apartment was this man — as he'd looked a decade before. Across the yard, his back against the board fence, a boy of perhaps twelve sat on the grass, watching us curiously, and for a moment I sat staring at him, trying to figure out what I could do or say. Then I turned to the old man and said, "I came because I've seen you before. In my apartment." Then I added my address and apartment number.

But he only nodded. "Used to live there," he agreed politely, and waited for me to go on. There was nothing else to do; I began at the beginning and told him what I'd seen. Gruener listened in silence, staring across the yard. I couldn't tell what he was thinking.

"Well," he said, smiling, when I finished, "it's all news to me. Didn't know there was a ghost of my former self wandering around 9M. Don't tell the landlord, or they'll be charging one of us extra rent."

His voice broke on the last word. I turned to look at him, and his expression had collapsed. His mouth gaped; his eyes stared. Then — I was horrified — two tears squeezed out from the corners of his eyes, and he covered his face with his hands. "No, no, no," he moaned in a whisper, "oh, let me alone."

The old man sat there, his elbows on his knees, his face buried in his hands, breathing slowly and deeply, getting hold of himself. Presently, turning to face me, he sat erect again, dropping his hands, and the muscles of his face were controlled once more, and he stared at me, his eyes sick. "You're seeing something — I have no idea why — that I try every day of my life not to think of. I paced that apartment once. I stared out that window, just as you saw me." His face twisted, and he shook his head. "I can still see it — the way that street looked in the dead of night. Hateful, hateful."

For half a minute he sat, his eyes wide and staring; but he had to go on now — we both knew that — and I waited. Quietly, he said, "I was trying to make up my mind to kill myself." He glanced at me. "I wasn't despondent; nothing like that. It was simply and obviously the only possible conclusion to my life."

The old man sat back in his chair, his hands on the arms. "I was once nearly president of one of the largest investment firms in the world. I got there by hard work, as I often told people, and it was true. But I didn't say that I got there, also, on other men's backs. I was and am a selfish man; I knew it, and I was proud of it. Nothing and no one ever stood in the way of what I wanted, not my wife, or even my son — and he's paying for that now, and always will, though that's another story."

The old man reached out and tapped my arm with a curved forefinger.

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"I justified it, boy. If a man can't take care of himself, it is no one else's concern; I said that all my life, and practiced it. I became chief clerk of my firm, manager, junior vice-president, senior vice-president and had the presidency in my grasp, and what happened to those who stood in my way was their affair, not mine." He smiled sadly. "But I, too, stood in someone's way, I discovered; someone like me, only smarter still.

"And instead of the presidency, I was suddenly out of the firm — out of a job and absolutely broke. By then, fortunately, I was a widower, but my home in the country was lost, and the rent was paid on the small apartment I used in the city during the week, for only nine more days, after which I had to move.

"In less than a single week's time, I was suddenly facing the choice of dependency, of actual charity or of ending my life; and the way I had lived demanded the latter. But I couldn't quite do it."

Contempt for himself was plain in his eyes as Gruener looked at me. "I almost could," he said. "I had it planned: sleeping tablets, with a note marked private, and mailed the evening before to an old friend, Dr. William Buhl. The note would have told Buhl what I'd done and why, and would have requested him to certify my death as heart failure. Whether he would have done so, I can't say; I could only hope that he would.

"Instead" — he spat the word out with sudden loathing — "I moved in here with my son and his family." He shrugged. "Oh, they were glad to have me, Lord knows why, though it meant extra expense, and they had to take the baby" — he nodded at the boy — "into their bedroom to make room for me.

"But if you think that's what bothered me, you're wrong. No, it was this: from a busy, prosperous man with considerable prestige in his occupation, I was suddenly turned into a nobody, living in a child's bedroom." He shook his head in disgust, and added, "Baby-sitting in the evenings, for the first six or eight years, helping with the dishes, reading the morning paper, listening to the radio in my bedroom with the Donald Duck wallpaper, sitting out here in the sun. That's been the absurd end to my life, just as I knew it would be when I made my decision."

Smiling bitterly, Gruener said, "And now you know what I was pondering, staring down through the windows of apartment 9M when somehow you saw me. I had the chance to justify the whole philosophy of my life — to be on top or forget the whole thing. But during two nights I could not achieve the courage to do it. And on the following night, I knew I had to. I stood there, I remember, staring down at that dismal street, hoping for help.

"Almost superstitiously, I stood hoping for some little sign, the least en-

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couragement from somewhere or anywhere. That is all I needed, I am certain, to tip the balance in the right direction. But of course there was no sign; it was up to me alone. When the night began to end, I had to make my own decision, and you see what I chose." The old man stood up. "Why you should see my 'ghost' or whatever it was, I don't know."

I stood, too, and we strolled toward the end of the yard. "But they say," he added, "that a particularly intense human experience can sometimes leave behind some sort of emanation or impression on the environment it happened in. And that under the right conditions it can be evoked again, almost like a recording that is left behind in the very air and walls of the room."

We reached the high wood fence and leaned on it, and Mr. Gruener turned to me, smiling a little. "Maybe that's what happened, boy. You, too, were up in the night in that very room. You, too, were pondering some problem, and maybe those were the right conditions: a sort of similarity of atmosphere that for a few moments could reach out and, like a delicate, beautifully tuned radio, bring back whatever impression my agonizing experience had made there. Or," he said, losing interest, and turned back into the yard, "maybe somehow it brought back the actual time itself, and you really saw me, solid and real. Perhaps you saw back through time itself, to twelve years before; I really don't know."

There was actually no comment to make, and all I could think of was, "Well, you made the right decision."

He stopped suddenly, there on the grass. "No, I did not! I've been a useless burden!" He walked on again, toward the chairs. "My son is no money-maker and never will be; he didn't even have a telephone when I came; so I had one installed, paying for it from the little income I still have. Pathetic, isn't it?" He smiled as we sat down. "Still trying to be somebody, even if no more than a name in a telephone book. Originally, I suppose, I had some idea that one of the firms would eventually be after me, in what capacity I don't know, and I wanted to be sure they could find me.

"No," he said belligerently, "I know now what I knew then: these extra years have meant nothing to me. And I also know now what I didn't even consider then: what these years have meant to my son, his wife and that child." He nodded at the boy across the yard. "I think he'd have a brother or sister now, if I could have done to myself what I did to others. As it is, there simply wasn't room for another baby, nor quite enough money. But without me, there would have been. I feel now what I would once have been incapable of feeling: that I deprived a grandchild of being born; a whole life was lost in exchange for something that should never have been — a few more useless years for me."

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Quickly, anticipating my objections, he cut them off, ending the conversation. "Well," he said, nodding at the boy, "at least it's been good watching him grow and develop; he's a nice boy, and one of the few things I'm proud of."

It's obvious, of course — and was obvious to me on the way back to Manhattan, through the rest of that day at the office and all through that evening — that in a sense I *had* seen a ghost of my future self, there at my apartment windows. Through the accident of occupying Gruener's apartment, I had somehow seen — how or why I couldn't imagine — what I might become myself.

But still, sitting and pretending to read that night, while Louisa knitted, my problem was a long way from the easy, obvious-at-a-glance dilemma of somebody else. I sat remembering the faces of men in my office — and they're in every office — who have reached their middle thirties, with their big chance lost somewhere in the past. At some point or another it dawns on them, and from then on, you can see it in their eyes that the confident ambition of their youth is never going to be fulfilled.

Shakespeare said it; I remembered the quotation vaguely, and got up and went to the bookshelves for our one-volume complete Shakespeare, and finally found the quotation in Julius Caesar. "There is a tide in the affairs of men," Brutus says, "which taken at the flood leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat, and we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures."

He was right, damn it! I sat there knowing it. You're not handed a promotion for being a good boy, for doing your work conscientiously or for always getting to the office on time! You're not handed it at all; you've got to make it and take it. And you've got to recognize the time for it and grab it while it's there.

Of course I was awake again that night. I dragged myself out to the davenport, and of course I saw Gruener's ghost again; and this time I got mad. I swear I hadn't even been thinking of him. I lay flat on my back, staring at the ceiling, and for a long time I was tempted to steer Ted Haymes off his idea and kiss my chance of stealing his job good-by. It was the peace of mind waiting for me the instant I'd decided that tempted me; the good feeling I knew would come flooding over me. I wanted that, and I knew it would sustain me for days and weeks. But at the back of my mind lay the question: Then what? Two or three more years as assistant before, finally, past thirty, I somehow made sales manager? Just a little too late, a little too old to be a candidate still for the really important jobs at the top?

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Lying there smoking in the dark, I *hated* Ted Haymes. He deserved nothing from me! The man was no good; was I going to sacrifice Louisa for *him*? I knew suddenly what was the matter with me. I was one of the timid people who want life to work out like a story, and when it doesn't, they retreat from it and call their timidity virtue.

There is a tide in the affairs of men, and this was mine and might never come again, and all of a sudden, in a flood of hot feeling, I was going to take it. I sat up on the davenport, shaken and deeply excited, knowing that from now on I was a different, tougher man, and I actually muttered out loud, giving myself a sort of miniature pep talk. "Do it!" I told myself. "Damn it, go ahead; all it takes is nerve." I felt pretty good, actually, and I started to get up, thinking I might even wake Louisa and tell her about it. And that's when I noticed Gruener's fat ghost in his crummy old bathrobe, standing at the windows again.

I was coldly furious; not scared in the least; and I really think I might have gone over to him and tried to do something about getting rid of him, though I don't know what. But he turned just then and once more crossed the room, avoiding the invisible barrier, and walked down the hall toward the bathroom, and then I remembered what Gruener had told me. He'd been up three nights with his problem, and now I'd seen him three nights, and I was certain this was the end of it. And it was. I went to bed then, and I've never seen Gruener's ghost since.

Have you ever noticed that once you decide you're going to give someone the business, you can't wait to start? And you can't lay it on too strong. Next morning at the office, I felt a kind of tough, hard cockiness about my decisions, and I asked Ted to lunch. He's a wise guy, a sneerer, and I actually had a ghost story I could prove; undoubtedly I was the first man in history who had the ghost himself to back up his story, and Ted was the man I wanted to back out on a limb, and then break it off.

In the restaurant booth he listened, true to type, with an amused and pitying sneer on his face, and I wondered why I'd ever thought twice about giving him even the least consideration. I didn't tell him, of course, what I'd actually been worrying over at night, but the rest was accurate, and occasionally, as I talked, he'd shake his head in mock pity, his idea of fine, rich humor. Then, when I finished, I let him sound off. I let him bray that mule laugh and listened patiently while he spouted theories about hallucinations, the ability of the mind to fool itself and the kind of glib psychiatric jargon people like Ted talk these days. He was the first of the many people who have assured me that I "dreamed" or "imagined" Gruener's ghost.

I let him rave, clear through dessert, knowing he was squirming to get

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back to the office and tell everybody, with a phony worried look, that I was "working too hard," and then wait for them to ask why. Finally, when he'd talked enough, I had him. I challenged him to go out to Gruener's with me that evening, and he had to say yes; he'd insulted me too much to say anything else. Then we just sat there, drinking coffee and stealing looks at each other.

People like Ted have a sort of low animal cunning, and pretty soon his eyes narrowed, and, excusing himself, he got up. A minute later he was back, beckoning slyly with his forefinger, like a stupid kid. He led me out to the telephone booth, and there, lying open at the G's, was a Brooklyn directory. "Show me," he said.

It wasn't there. The name Harris L. Gruener simply was not in the telephone book, that's all; and that afternoon at the office, people smiled when I went by, and once, when I was standing at the water cooler, someone called "Boo!" in a quavering, very comical voice. It might sound funny, but it drove me crazy — I *knew* what I'd seen — and a million dollars in cash couldn't have stopped me from doing what I did; I walked out of that office and headed for Brooklyn.

To my everlasting relief, the house was still there, looking just the same, and when I pushed the button, the musical chime sounded inside. No one answered; so I walked around at the side, and, sure enough, there was the rusty wire gate, and there was young Mrs. Gruener hanging out a wash. The boy was there, too, playing catch with another kid, and I felt so relieved I waved and called, "Hi!" very exuberantly.

Mrs. Gruener came over, and I said, "Hello." She answered grudgingly, the way housewives do when they're busy, as though I were a salesman or something. "Mr. Gruener home?" I said.

"No," she answered, "he's at work," and I wondered why we had to go through that routine again and wondered if she were stupid or something.

"No, I mean Mr. Gruener, Sr. Harris L., that is."

This time she really looked suspicious and didn't answer for several seconds. Then, watching my face, her voice flat, she said, "Mr. Gruener is dead."

She got her reaction; I was stunned. "When?" I managed to say, finally. "I'm terribly sorry. When did it happen?"

Her eyes narrowed. "Who are you, mister? And what do you want?"

I didn't know what to say. "Don't you remember me?"

"No. Just what do you want, anyway?"

I could hardly think, but there was something I suddenly had to know. "I'm an old friend of his, and . . . didn't know he died. Tell me — please tell me — when did he die?"

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In a cold, utterly antagonistic voice, she said, "He died twelve years ago, and all his 'old friends' knew it at the time."

I had to get out of there, but there was one more thing I had to say. "I could have sworn I'd seen him later than that. Right here, too; and you were here at the time. You're sure you don't remember me?"

She said, "I certainly am. Far as I know, I never saw you before in my life," and I knew she was telling the truth.

I've quit looking up Harris L. Gruener in Brooklyn telephone books, because it's never there. But it was. It *was* there once, and I saw it; I didn't "dream" or "imagine" it, and all the Ted Haymeses in the world can't make me think so, and I'll tell you why! I phoned the doctor Gruener had mentioned. "Why, yes," he said — he sounded like a nice guy — "the cause of Gruener's death is public information; you could read it on the death certificate. Harris Gruener died of heart failure, twelve years ago."

I know it's not proof, I *know* that, but — don't you see? Out of the hundreds of cases that doctor must have treated in twelve years' time, *why did he remember this one instantly?* Unless there is something about it that will make it stick in his mind forever.

I know why, I know what happened. There in my living room, on that third night, knowing he had to make up his mind, Harris Gruener stood staring down at the street. For him it was twelve years ago — 1940 — and he stood waiting for a sign that would help him to do what he felt he had to. For me it was the present; and as I lay there a decision rose up in me, and I said suddenly, intensely, "Do it! Damn it, go ahead; all it takes is nerve." And across the years, across whatever connection had been briefly evoked between us, Gruener heard. He heard it, perhaps, at only a whisper, or only in his mind.

But Gruener did hear it, I know, and, more than that, he understood what perhaps I did not — that, morally, it was a decision for suicide. "Do it!" he heard me say, and he of all people knew what that meant, and — he did it. He turned then, I am certain, back again in the year 1940, and he walked to the bathroom where the sleeping tablets were. Then he wrote a note to William Buhl, dropped it down the mail chute out in the hall and went to bed for the last time.

Don't ask me how it happened, or why — ask Einstein. *I* don't know if time shifts sometimes; if events that have already happened can be made to happen again, this time in another way. I don't know *how* it could happen; I only know that it did.

How do I know? That boy playing catch in the back yard of the Gruener

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home was the same boy I saw the first time, exactly. But the other boy, who was playing catch with him; I didn't see him the first time, because he wasn't there. He wasn't anywhere; he didn't exist. But he does now, and I know who he is; there's no mistaking the resemblance. He's the first boy's brother. They're alike as twins, though not the same height; the second boy is younger, by a year or so, I'd say. They're nice kids; I'm certain of that. And I'm certain that if old Mr. Gruener could see them, he'd be happy and proud of his grandchildren — both of them.

No one really believes me, and I can't blame them, I guess. Some people even think my story is a psychopathic excuse for failure; time is moving on and there's still an "Assistant" in front of my title. I wish I could say that Ted Haymes is grateful for that, and, while I doubt it, maybe he is. All morning, the day after I'd told him about Gruener's ghost, he'd amuse the whole office every chance he got by staring fatuously past my shoulder in horror as though he'd suddenly seen a ghost. With Ted, that kind of juvenile joke would ordinarily continue for weeks; but after I steered him off his sampling plan that afternoon, and explained why I had, he never pulled his joke again.

I doubt that it was from gratitude, but I do think he got a glimpse of the truth of what happened to me and was a little scared, for the same reason I was. And maybe from now on he'll be a little different sort of person, too; I really can't say.

But I'm grateful to Gruener, anyway. There in my living room he and I once stood at a crossroads together; and the decision I reached sent him in the direction, finally, that his whole life had led up to; he could not escape it. But when I understood what had happened, I took the other road, while I still had the chance. So I'm grateful to Harris Gruener and sorry for him, too. There is a tide, all right, but whether a man should take it or not depends on where he wants to go.

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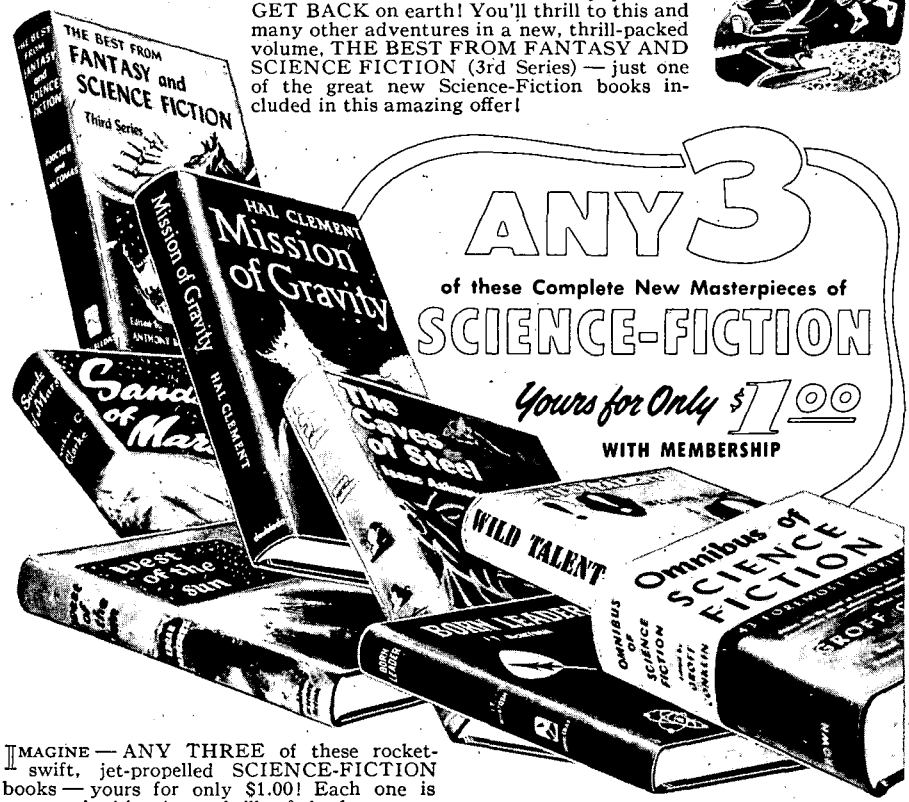

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